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ABSTRACT

This collection presents 90 papers or summaries of papers presented at a 2000 conference on self-study and institutional improvement for institutions of higher education. Papers are grouped into these chapters, with some sample topics in parentheses: (1) "New Designs in Higher Education, Improving Student Learning: Selected PEW Projects" (institutional portfolios); (2) "New Designs in Higher Education, New Designs To Improve Student Learning" (unified approach to learning; general education); (3) "New Designs in Higher Education, New Designs for School/College Collaborations" (project descriptions); (4) "New Designs in Higher Education. New Designs through National, State, and Community Initiatives" (project descriptions); (5) "New Designs in Higher Education: Research Reports" (accreditation; assessment); (6) "New Designs and Good Practices in Distance Learning" (guidelines; benchmarking); (7) "New Designs and Good Practices in Adult Learner Programs" (adult students; program development); (8) "New Designs in Higher Education. Quality Improvement in Higher Education" (Academic Quality Improvement Project); (9) "Gaining and Maintaining Faculty Participation in Assessment" (teacher evaluation; accreditation); (10) "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Tools for Assessment" (evaluation methods; tools); (11) "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Special Challenges" (part-time students; multi-campus systems; rural colleges); (12) "Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Program Review" (program development; general education); (13) "New Designs in Using the Self-Study: Mission, Planning, and Institutional Change" (strategic planning; mission statements); (14) "Coordinating the Self-Study" (methodology); (15) "Self-Study: Practical Advice" (strategies; data collection); and (16) "Self-Study: Special Challenges" (focused visits;

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2001

Prepared for the program of

The Higher Learning Commission

"Serving the Common Good: New Designs in Higher Education"

at the 106th Annual Meeting of the North Central Association

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THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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The papers included in this collection offer the viewpoints of their authors. The Commission highly recommends them for study and for the advice they contain, but none represent official Commission directions, rules, or policies.

Susan E. Van Kollenburg, Editor

The Higher Learning Commission
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Foreword

In choosing the theme for this year's Annual Meeting, we expected that the first phrase of the Commission's new mission statement—Serving the Common Good—would provide an exciting focus for many presenters. And it did. In this set of papers we read about efforts of colleges to enhance access to higher learning for many types of students. We learn of important efforts to breach outdated walls that make difficult the transportability of higher learning. We can only admire the commitments of many institutions to hold themselves accountable for the learning their students achieve. We must applaud the renewed commitment of educators to ensure that higher education is as effective in challenging students to be independent and creative thinkers as it is in making them employable.

It is in the new designs that we come to appreciate how different higher education must become from what it was barely a decade or two ago. For example, you find in these pages multiple references to portfolios, not simply as a tool for measuring student learning but also as a method for institutions to make public their goals and their achievements. Technology shapes the tools institutions use to evaluate institutional effectiveness even as it reconfigures the teaching and learning environments within and among institutions. And while quality improvement is not new to higher educational institutions, its importance in creating new designs for accreditation is.

This Annual Meeting is unique because the core business of the Commission is "assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning." But the basic culture of higher education is shifting, with increasing emphasis on accountability for student learning. Many presenters take current practices and give them new power in these changing times: self-study, strategic planning, mission revision. Several excellent papers speak to the central challenge of keeping vital the role of the total faculty in protecting protect academic quality in this period of change in the academic culture.

Another Annual Meeting with *The Collection of Papers* becoming another major resource for the Commission and all of its affiliated institutions. The lessons contained in this volume are many and varied. They deserve our study and use.

Steven D. Crow
Executive Director

March 1, 2001

Preface

On behalf of the Commission, I am pleased to present the 2001 edition of the *Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement.* Now in its seventeenth year, the *Collection of Papers* has moved beyond a supplement to the Meeting presentations to be a remarkable resource throughout the year for all who are interested in issues of higher education quality. We are grateful to our speakers for their generous contributions to the work of the Commission through these papers as well as through their presentations at the Annual Meeting.

The theme of the 2001 Annual Meeting, "Serving the Common Good: New Designs in Higher Education," is woven throughout the *Collection,* with *collaboration* emerging as a strong subtheme in many papers, regardless of the focus. For the twelve years of the Commission's Assessment Initiative, the *Collection of Papers* has highlighted institutional efforts to assess student academic achievement. In this year's edition, discussions of assessment efforts are not limited to the chapters on assessment, but appear in more than forty papers throughout the volume. In addition, this year's *Collection* includes a group of papers from the some of the first institutions participating in the Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). For those involved in self-study, the *Collection of Papers* goes beyond the policies and procedures provided in the *Handbook of Accreditation,* to give practical advice based on actual experience. Several papers explore alternatives to traditional self-study.

Producing a book of this size in five weeks requires significant team effort. Special thanks are given to the following individuals who made the 2001 *Collection* possible: Marisol Gomez and Viki Berberich, for their help in processing initial submissions and preparing files; Sybil Sosin, for her valuable editorial assistance; Gerald Van Kollenburg, for his extraordinary assistance with the layout, particularly the charts and graphics; Kathleen Herring, for the beautiful cover design; and Aaron Marsh of Honi Graphics, for always getting the book printed in time for the Meeting.

The Commission invites your comments about the *Collection of Papers* and welcomes your suggestions for future topics for the Annual Meeting program. I hope that you will consider participation as a speaker at a future Meeting. The strength of the Annual Meeting lies in the willingness of our institutions to share their experiences with others. I look forward to seeing you in at the Meeting.

Susan E. Van Kollenburg
Editor
Associate Director for Programs, Publications,
and Member Services

March 1, 2001

Ed. note: The name of the Commission was changed from the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education to The Higher Learning Commission effective January 1, 2001. In their papers, authors may have referred to this organization as the North Central Association, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, or The Higher Learning Commission. Information about the name change is available on the Commission's web site: www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org.

Chapter 1

New Designs in Higher Education

Improving Student Learning: Selected PEW Projects

The Higher Learning Commission

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North Central Association
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**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Electronic Institutional Portfolios: Using the Web for Assessment, Improvement, and Accountability

Susan Kahn
Ann Feldman
Barbara Ellen Walvoord

Overview

Electronic institutional portfolios are an emerging medium that uses the World Wide Web to exhibit, assess, and report on teaching and learning at the institutional level. In the Urban Universities Portfolio Project (UUPP), a two-and-a-half-year-old national initiative, the portfolios under development go beyond traditional presentational models for reporting assessment results in several ways: they use the electronic environment to engage groups within the university in collective self-examination and reflection on student learning and educational effectiveness; they incorporate interactivity with portfolio users; and they employ multimedia to actually show—not just describe or explain—teaching and learning.

In addition to capturing student learning in more vivid and varied ways than a paper report might do, electronic institutional portfolios can be especially effective for demonstrating continuous institutional improvement and for evaluating an institution within the framework of its own particular mission. These strengths are consistent with current emphases in accreditation; regional accrediting associations may thus find electronic institutional portfolios useful as a new form of self-study. Indeed, one association, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, recently mandated institutional portfolios in place of traditional self-studies, and several of the other regionals may follow suit. The description below of how one institution is documenting the teaching and learning of writing illustrates the utility of portfolios for presenting the kinds of evidence of educational effectiveness that accreditors and other stakeholders seek.

The Urban Universities Portfolio Project

The Urban Universities Portfolio Project: Assuring Quality for Multiple Publics brings together six leading urban public universities[1] to develop electronic institutional portfolios that demonstrate the universities' effectiveness to various groups of stakeholders, including accreditors. Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and cosponsored by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), the project has three main purposes: to enhance internal and external stakeholders' understanding of the mission of urban public universities; to develop a new approach to cultivating ongoing internal improvement; and to experiment with new ways of demonstrating and evaluating effectiveness and accountability in the context of mission. The vehicle for achieving these purposes is the set of six electronic institutional portfolios that project universities are developing.

Institutional portfolios might be thought of as offspring or siblings of faculty teaching and course portfolios and of student learning portfolios. Over the past decade, such portfolios have come into widespread use within higher education as vehicles for individual and institutional learning, evaluation, reflection, and improvement. Among the key characteristics of these types of portfolios are their inclusion of authentic primary materials as evidence for effective teaching and learning, and their use of reflective narrative to provide a context of self-evaluation and improvement of faculty and student efforts. These portfolios are generally framed by statements of educational philosophy or desired educational outcomes, against which the evidence of actual achievement in the portfolios can be measured.

Enter the World Wide Web, which vastly expands the possibilities for exhibiting authentic evidence (e.g., graphical materials, audio and video of class sessions or of faculty and students discussing teaching and learning experiences), for making information easily accessible, and for permitting viewers to examine materials at varying levels of detail. Both faculty and students took the opportunity to adapt the portfolio concept to a web format, with some institutions requiring or encouraging web-based, rather than paper, portfolios for students.

The web, with its capacity for storing large amounts of material and enabling multiple pathways through those materials, also made feasible the expansion of the portfolio concept to the entire institution. Like faculty and student portfolios, institutional portfolios have at their core authentic evidence of teaching and learning, and reflective narrative. But the evidence and narrative are selected and created as part of a collective–ideally, institution-wide–process of examining and reflecting on teaching and learning and their improvement. In the UUPP, participating institutions have found that work on their web-based electronic portfolios has energized and catalyzed assessment and planning efforts. All six universities in the project have launched significant assessment and improvement initiatives resulting directly from their portfolio work, and have used the portfolio effort to bring greater coherence, cohesiveness, and effectiveness to existing improvement initiatives.

The project envisions portfolio development not as a one-time task, but as an ongoing system that allows a university to monitor its performance and document that performance for internal and external stakeholders. The electronic portfolio web sites will thus evolve continuously, demonstrating changes and improvements unfolding over real time. In this way, the portfolios incorporate a commitment to continuous, rather than episodic, self-assessment and improvement and demonstrate the universities' skills in assessment and self-correction. For accreditation purposes, such a standing portfolio might be supplemented by a short set of guidelines for navigating the portfolio site and perhaps by an executive summary of portfolio highlights, obviating the need for a massive and expensive self-study effort carried out solely for the purposes of an accreditation review.

As the portfolios develop, the UUPP is experimenting with ways in which site visits and electronic institutional portfolios might complement one another, leading to new approaches that external evaluators, especially accreditors, might use to learn about and evaluate institutions. Experimental visits in spring 2000 and spring 2001 are using the portfolios and other evidence provided by the universities to examine learning outcomes as well as institutions' processes for assuring educational quality and effectiveness. Visitors are considering such questions as: How has the institution developed systems for assessing its own performance? What are the standards of evidence? What are the results? How can virtual visits to the portfolio web sites be most effectively combined with physical visits to the campus? Can visitors combine consultative and evaluative roles? Can they help the institution become a learning organization?

An Institutional Example

The electronic environment of the World Wide Web presents enormous potential for displaying multiple types of qualitative and quantitative evidence for learning. The evolving UUPP portfolios use an array of information–primary materials from students and faculty, assessment findings, institutional data, and reflective critiques–to make their point about the institutions' effectiveness in nurturing students' intellectual development.

Take, for example, the student writing section of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) portfolio. To demonstrate how students learn to write at the university, the portfolio includes information, actual syllabi, and discussion of key concepts included in the university's first-year writing sequence, supplemented by student stories–audio discussion by students about their writing experiences at UIC. In addition, the section contains a wealth of information on writing assessment: detailed outcomes statements for first-year writing courses, placement criteria and statistics, description of writing portfolio assessment criteria, with examples of student work, and results of before-and-after surveys of students who have taken required writing courses on their perceptions of gains in specific writing skills, such as "writing in a personal voice" or "developing a strong argument."

The materials, information, and evidence that UIC presents add up to a detailed characterization of how the first-year writing program contributes to students' undergraduate education. Writing faculty at UIC expect that the portfolio will also serve as a resource for the university as it develops upper-level writing requirements. UIC plans to continue developing the writing portion of its institutional portfolio, as well as sections on other core learning outcomes that will serve both the university's internal assessment and improvement efforts, and will provide external stakeholders with a wide array of evidence of how students acquire skills in writing and other fundamental areas over their undergraduate careers.

Note

1. Participating institutions include California State University, Sacramento; Georgia State University; Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis; Portland State University; the University of Illinois at Chicago; and the University of Massachusetts Boston.

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Making Student Learning Central: Principles and Practices for Implementation

James Roth
Mark Gromko
Susan McGury
David Wissmann

Participating Institutions

- Alverno College, Milwaukee, WI
- Avila College, Kansas City, MO
- Birmingham Southern College, Birmingham, AL
- Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH
- California State University-Fullerton
- California State University-Monterey Bay, Seaside
- Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg
- Clayton College and State University, Morrow, GA
- Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, GA
- Huston-Tillotson College, Austin, TX
- Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana
- Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis
- James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA
- Niagara University Niagara, University, NY
- North Carolina State University, Raleigh
- Olivet College, Olivet, MI
- Rivier College, Nashua, NH
- Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Terre Haute, IN
- Samford University, Birmingham, AL
- The School for New Learning at DePaul University, Chicago, IL
- Seton Hill College, Greensburg, PA
- State University of New York College at Fredonia
- Truman State University, Kirksville, MO
- Unity College, Unity, ME
- University of Alaska-Southeast, Juneau
- University of Washington, Seattle
- University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse

The Student Learning Outcomes Initiative is a collaborative effort by twenty-seven public and private baccalaureate degree-granting institutions to create and publish a framework that will identify the assumptions, principles, and practices that institutions could use in making student learning the organizing principle of their campuses. This initiative is being funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The following is an introduction to the third draft of the document (still in process), "Student Learning: A Central Focus for Institutions of Higher Education," by The Student Learning Outcomes Initiative. Publication date: Fall 2001.

Introduction

What can we do to improve the quality of student learning in our institutions? This is a question that all of us involved in higher education ask ourselves regularly. It does not imply that we are not already making significant efforts to foster student learning on our campuses. It merely reflects the ongoing commitment to making our institutions the most effective learning environments we can, and it is the question at the heart of this framework and the accompanying institutional examples. The institutions that have participated in the authoring of this document are actively engaged in responding to the question on our own campuses, and we hope that the document will contribute to a public dialogue about how to improve student learning across higher education.

We see this publication as an invitation to inquiry into and discourse about what it means to make student learning a central focus for institutions of higher education. In this context, the framework we have developed is a way of thinking about student learning rather than a blueprint to follow. It reflects the kind of intellectual discourse in which we have been engaged during this initiative, and we hope it will provide support for productive innovation in the service of student learning.

The reader will notice that we use questions throughout the framework as a way of stimulating a particular line of thought or suggesting a specific focus

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for consideration. This also reflects our own experience in working together to author the framework. The wide variety of institutions involved in this collaboration was intentional. We thought this was important in order to represent the breadth of institutional cultures in higher education, and this made our discussions rich and complex. We have clearly come to agreement on some principles that seem essential to effective student learning, but we also found in our discussions no single approach or practice that is appropriate in all settings. We discovered, for example, that even arriving at a common language to use in considering issues of teaching, assessment, and learning can be a struggle. In this spirit we encourage the readers of this framework to use it as a stimulus for exploration on your own campuses, and across institutions as well.

We intend the specific examples that accompany the framework to be practical ways to further a student learning focus on your campuses. Again, this does not mean that any one of the examples will necessarily transfer directly to your own context, but they should provide helpful illustrations of how you might address specific concerns at your own institutions. Our underlying assumption throughout the framework and the examples is that taking a student learning-centered perspective on our work as higher educational institutions can make us more intentional in all that we do.

In surveying institutions across the country and in our conversations with one another throughout the writing of this document, we have found that colleges and universities where student learning is a central focus of faculty, staff, and administrators tend to exhibit certain characteristics. We use these following characteristics and related questions as the organizing structure of this document.

- **Achieve clarity about learning outcomes:**
  What do we mean by the term, *student learning outcomes?*
  How do institutions determine learning outcomes?
  How are student learning outcomes related to degree requirements?
  What is involved in conceptualizing student learning developmentally?

- **Coordinate teaching and assessment to promote student learning:**
  How do student learning outcomes assist us to "think pedagogically"?
  What can we learn about our students to assist them in learning?
  What are the relationships between teaching and assessment?
  How can we help students develop processes of self-assessment?

- **Align structures and resources to serve student learning:**
  What forms of inquiry foster a focus on student learning?
  How can we support and recognize these forms of inquiry?
  How can we allocate resources to make student learning central?
  How can we take a systemic approach to institutional alignment?

- **Work continuously to improve the environment for learning:**
  What measures are best suited to assess institutional effectiveness?
  How can the results of institutional assessment be used for improvement?
  What is involved in taking collective responsibility for learning?
  How can we encourage innovation in the service of student learning?

Throughout the framework we explore the meaning of these characteristics, with the questions as both guides and food for thought. In the process we offer principles and practices that suggest ways of addressing the characteristics. In the section on institutional examples, we illustrate specific approaches that institutions have taken to foster one or more of the characteristics. We hope that both the framework and the institutional examples will be of assistance in developing sustained and thoughtful inquiry within and across our institutions.

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Electronic Institutional Portfolios and the Self-Study: A Dynamic Combination for Quality Assurance

Sharon Hamilton
Karen Black

What Is the Issue?

Accrediting associations across the country are exploring a range of new approaches to assuring quality through the accreditation process. Concurrently, institutions of higher learning are also exploring new ways to present evidence of quality not only to accrediting associations but also to many other stakeholders. One such innovative approach is the Urban Universities Portfolio Project, a Pew-funded, AAHE-sponsored national initiative involving six urban campuses in the development of electronic institutional portfolios to demonstrate to multiple audiences how each university meets its mission and commitment to its urban constituencies. Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), currently preparing for its 2002 NCA accreditation visit, is one of the six universities involved in this project. It is therefore intensely engaged in developing a functional relationship between traditional self-study and the electronic institutional portfolio as documents for quality assurance.

The electronic portfolio, like the self-study, offers a portrayal of campus mission, strategic plan, goals, processes for achieving goals, and indicators of effectiveness in the achievement of goals. Unlike the self-study, however, the electronic portfolio is dynamic and interactive, responsive to the interests of visitors, and continually updated. It provides a unique blend of quantitative and qualitative evidence, with opportunities to link to and thereby probe more deeply into the workings of the university. Moreover, it is not a once-in-ten-years endeavor imposed by the need for accreditation, but rather an ongoing demonstration of the effectiveness of the university in achieving its goals.

One major problem is that most accrediting institutions are not accustomed to dealing with electronic documentation and find the traditional self-study more convenient, even as they acknowledge the greater efficiency and greater potential of the electronic portfolio. Consequently, while some accrediting agencies, for example the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), are moving toward virtual campus visits based on electronic documentation, others prefer the more traditional campus visit and published self-study. This presentation deals with that dilemma: how might the electronic institutional portfolio and traditional self-study work together as documentation without undue duplication or unnecessary use of faculty, staff, and administrative resources of time?

What Is an Electronic Institutional Portfolio?

The electronic institutional portfolio is a new medium for communicating to interested people what we do, how well we do it, and what steps we are taking to improve. The prime function of the electronic institutional portfolio is to demonstrate to multiple stakeholders the effectiveness of the institution in achieving its mission. It involves, as do most portfolios, collection, selection, reflection, and presentation, but in a more fluid, dynamic manner than the typical paper-based portfolio. IUPUI, a campus of more than 27,000 students in 21 academic and professional units set in the urban center of the Indiana state capital, has a trifold mission: to promote excellence in the areas of student learning; research, scholarship, and creative activity; and civic engagement. While the essential features of this mission have not changed over the years, the recent establishment of a community college system in Indiana has altered the some of the attributes by which we define excellence in each of these areas. For example, when student demographics of the first-year incoming class changed in 2000 from predominately older, part-time students to predominately traditional-aged full-time students, the teaching-learning environment changed as well. Furthermore, because this demographic change was coupled with a significant change in class standing of the first year students, from being predominately in the lower 50 percent of class standing to being predominately in the top 50 percent of class standing, expectations for and definitions of excellence in student learning also changed. Similarly, expectations for involving students in undergraduate and graduate research changed because more students are on campus full time. These are just two of countless examples of how changes in one aspect of a university campus alter the ways in which the campus determines its effectiveness in achieving its mission, but they serve to make the point that, while ten-year self-studies may benchmark changes in how institutional effectiveness is defined, the electronic institutional portfolio can provide a more contemporary and timely demonstration of how the institution defines and evaluates its effectiveness.

How Does the Electronic Portfolio Assure Institutional Quality and Program Effectiveness?

One of the challenges of the project has been to discover how to maximize the electronic environment to demonstrate to a diverse array of stakeholders how effectively IUPUI is achieving its mission. What we have learned is that, once campus-wide indicators of effectiveness have been established in relation to student learning, research, and civic engagement, the portfolio has the capacity to present both qualitative and quantitative evidence in graphic, narrative, and multi-media applications. Visitors to the web site are able to probe as deeply as they need in order to find evidence. By developing a conceptual framework with built-in requirements for self-reflection and self-assessment, every item in the portfolio becomes a document that supports our claim of striving toward excellence in student learning; research, scholarship, and creative activity; and civic engagement. Moreover, the site includes not only institutional products, such as analyzed surveys, individual student portfolios, annual reports of schools, and academic programs available, but also the processes by which these products come into being.

How Does the Electronic Institutional Portfolio Relate to and Represent the Work of the Campus?

While the IUPUI portfolio began almost three years ago as part of a three-year funded project, with a team assigned to conceptualize and develop the framework of the portfolio, the aim has always been to integrate the portfolio completely into the ongoing work of the campus. Consequently, as IUPUI has worked to redefine its expectations for student learning; research, scholarship and creative activity; and civic engagement, the portfolio team has been included in these conversations and, in some instances, has precipitated them. Hence, there is a dynamic relationship between strategic planning for institutional effectiveness; the work of faculty, staff, and students in trying to achieve this effectiveness through their disparate roles; and the presentation of both planning and results—processes and products, if you will—in the electronic portfolio.

Much of this session will guide you through the portfolio as it currently exists to show you how it presents both quantitative and qualitative evidence of our striving for excellence in relation to our mission. For those unable to attend the session, please visit the portfolio at http://www.imir.iupui.edu/iupuifolio. One exciting offspring of this institutional portfolio has been the development of individual student portfolios to demonstrate student engagement with six foundational principles of undergraduate learning at IUPUI, as well as their progress through their academic majors or professional programs. Some of these portfolios are available at http://eport.iupui. The project web site at http://www.imir.iupui.edu/portfolio shows how the other five urban institutions involved in the portfolio have developed their demonstrations of institutional effectiveness, each in a different way.

As this brief overview suggests, the development of an electronic institutional portfolio is a formidable task. However, it may have a tremendous payoff. Once developed, it may ultimately negate the need for the accreditation self-study or may, at the very least, provide supportive resources for a much attenuated and focused self-study.

What Is the Relationship Between the IUPUI Portfolio and the NCA Self-Study?

The North Central Association currently prefers a more traditional visit and a published self-study. However, in 2002, when North Central will review IUPUI, the interaction between the accreditation process and the IUPUI Electronic Portfolio will play out in at least three ways: the portfolio will serve as a repository of documents related to the self-study; the portfolio will serve to explicate assertions made about effectiveness by providing documentation and elaboration; and the self-study process and the portfolio development process have a symbiotic relationship wherein each serves to guide and be guided by the other.

As previously mentioned, NCA currently prefers a more traditionally published self-study. However, the entire self-study and an index will be part of the portfolio. Thus, the portfolio becomes a repository and historical resource for future accreditation processes, whether NCA or discipline-specific.

To enhance the self-study, the portfolio will serve to explicate, document, and embellish the self-study. The written, traditional self-study will refer the reader to the portfolio to further explain or document processes, outcomes, or historical events that have taken place on the campus since the last accreditation visit. To accomplish this, the self-study groups will use the work already done in forming the portfolio as points of departure.

Thus, the work of the portfolio influences and, in some ways, guides the work of the self-study. Likewise, the work of the self-study committees guides the development of the portfolio. The two processes become interdependent. Since the campus-wide Future Group and other planning-related groups guide formal campus planning efforts and also serve to guide the accreditation self-study process and the portfolio development, the portfolio and accreditation processes thereby become critical to campus planning.

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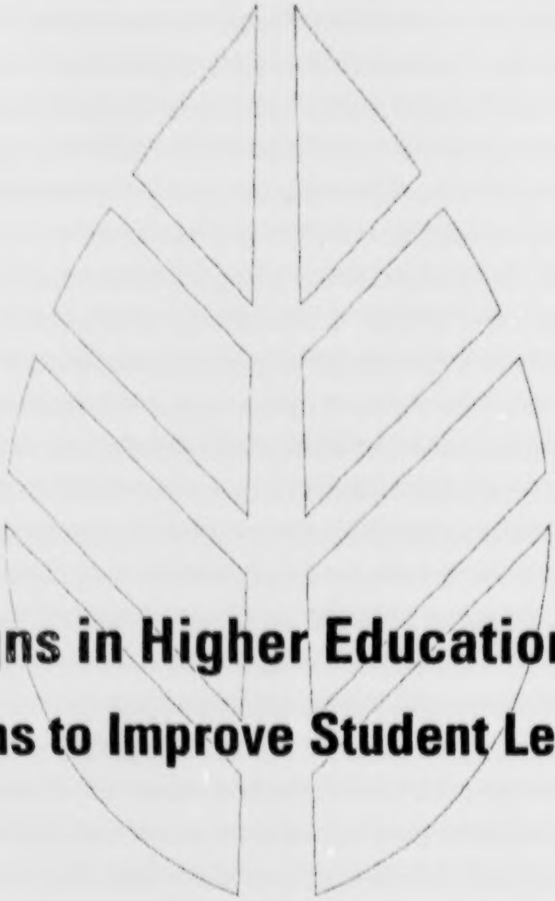

Chapter 2

New Designs in Higher Education
New Designs to Improve Student Learning

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago

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Collaboration and the Common Good: New Designs for Developing a Unified Approach to Student Learning

Jack P. Calareso
Thomas V. Boeke
Robert A. Bonfiglio

In recent years, renewed attention both within and outside of the academy has been given to the centrality of student learning to the mission of higher education. A critical element in this discussion has been a call for collaboration between the academic and student affairs units of our institutions. While providing what some have called a "seamless" educational experience for our students may seem to be a call to stray further afield from the classical traditions of higher education, the call for collaboration is not based on the intent to diminish the potential for student achievement, but to enhance it. The call for collaboration is founded on the ideals of educational excellence and institutional integrity, and on the idea that a liberating educational experience is one that contributes to the development of the whole person.

To collaborate is "to work together, especially in a joint intellectual Effort" (Morris, William, ed. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980, 260). While there may be something romantic about the notion of a solitary scholar engaged in painstaking research that sometimes comes to mind when one thinks of higher learning, it is more common on our nation's campuses to find teachers working together with students in classrooms, labs, and on field excursions, and staff members working together with students in residence halls and in clubs and organizations than it is to find the solitary researcher. From the perspective of administering colleges and universities, our institutions yearn to be managed collegially. From the sociological perspective, as individuals working in shared space, we strive to learn from each other, as the late Ernest Boyer pointed out, in community (Boyer, Ernest L. *Campus Life: In Search of Community.* Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). Why is it, then, that we see the need to trumpet the value of collaboration? It seems almost as if faculty and staff dwell in opposing camps and define collaboration not as working jointly on an intellectual endeavor, but as cooperating "treasonably, as with an enemy occupying one's country" (Morris, 261).

Part of the dilemma higher education faces has to do not with how we view collaboration, but with how we define learning. Conventionally, when one thinks about learning one thinks of the classroom setting, of the distinct roles of teacher and student, and of a formal curriculum. Learning, however, takes place in a variety of settings and forms. It is the realization that there is educational value in other aspects of the college experience, experiences that go beyond the classroom, that prompts one to consider the value of collaboration.

This realization has been gaining greater acceptance in American higher education over the course of almost twenty years. During this period, the rationale for the perspective that learning encompasses more than classroom learning was articulated by the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education. In the groundbreaking report, *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education,* it was asserted that the degree of student learning and educational effectiveness that takes place in the collegiate setting is directly related to the degree to which students are involved in the lives of their institutions beyond the classrooms, engaged in such activities as working on campuses, participating in student organizations, and interacting frequently with faculty and peers. (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education. *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1984.) This might seem counterintuitive to the scholar who sees time spent by students in employment and in active involvement in clubs as time better spent reading, writing, and studying. It is a counterintuitive argument if we insist on defining learning narrowly. Yet it would seem that by defining learning narrowly we run the risk of betraying the very nature of higher education.

A faculty member's expertise is rooted in a discipline. However, studies of first-year college students have shown over time that rarely is it a specific discipline that attracts students and their parents to higher education. Rather, as revealed in national surveys of the freshman year, of Alexander Astin, students primarily choose to come to college "to be able to get a better job," "to be able to make more money," and more generally, "to learn more about things" (Dey, Eric, Astin, Alexander, and Korn, William. *The American Freshman: Twenty-Five Year Trends.* Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 1991, 112-113.) The collegiate experience is widely valued for its ability to teach life skills and for the entree it offers into the world of the professions. American higher education is not merely designed for postsecondary career training or credentialling. These functions of higher education, while valid in themselves, are not the only functions. Our institution's aims are much loftier, and our expectations are more ambitious.

In many cases the call to collaboration is one that is readily embraced by the student affairs administrator. It is seen by some student affairs personnel as an answer to the perception that they are second-class citizens in the academic community. The attraction to faculty is usually less evident. Cross-institutional collaboration should, in fact, be equally of interest to presidents, academic administrators, and faculty as well as student affairs' administrators for, as the literature on student learning shows, student involvement with faculty and staff outside of the classroom impacts positively on students' critical thinking ability, intellectual flexibility, capacity for self-awareness and self-reflection, ability to communicate effectively, problem-solving skills, conflict-management skills, and time- and stress-management skills. (Whitt, Elizabeth J. *Student Learning as Student Affairs Work: Responding to Our Imperative.* Washington, D.C.: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1999).

Given the breadth and depth of the impact on student learning of student interaction with faculty and staff outside of the classroom, the potential is great for faculty members working with students outside of the classroom to contribute to students' individual growth and development. The potential is also great for faculty working with students to contribute to the success of their institution as a whole. In the words of Alexander Astin:

> Student-faculty relationship has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with the college experience than any other involvement variable or, indeed, any other student or institutional characteristic. Students who interact frequently with faculty are more satisfied with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even administration of the institution. Finding ways to encourage greater personal contact between faculty and students might increase students' satisfaction with their college experience. (Astin, Alexander. *Four Critical Years: Effects of College on Beliefs, Attitudes, and Knowledge.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978, 22)

It is Astin's view that purposeful, professional student-faculty relationships developed through the kinds of out-of-class activities that can be facilitated by student affairs staff members can contribute to student retention and academic success and to the fulfillment of an institution's educational mission. Collaboration between faculty and staff in the development of educationally purposeful out-of-class activities can also contribute to the development of a culture of student involvement. George Kuh and John Schuh have composed a description of the characteristics of "an involving college" that depicts the role of faculty in promoting student involvement:

> An involving college has a clear, coherent mission and philosophy that communicate high but reasonable challenges for students buttressed by ethics of care and membership. Interpersonal distinctions are deliberately accentuated, or minimized, to attain the institution's educational purposes and a clear, unwavering commitment has been made to become a multicultural campus community. The physical setting (rural, near a city, surrounded by a metropolitan area) is used to educational advantage by creating human-scale settings that discourage anonymity and provide numerous opportunities for participation in the life of the institution. A complicated web of cultural artifacts (history, myths, sagas, heroes/heroines, traditions, rites and rituals, subcultures, institution-specific language) underscores the importance of involvement and communicates to students "how the institution works." Policies and practices hold students responsible for their own behavior and learning, blur the artificial boundaries between in-class and out-of-class learning opportunities, distribute resources consistent with the institution's educational purposes, and enable subcommunities of students to flourish, such as ethnic or academic theme houses. In some subtle and not-so-subtle ways, faculty and staff promote student participation in educationally purposeful out-of-class learning activities. (Kuh, George D. and John H. Schuh, editors. *The Role and Contribution of Student Affairs in Involving Colleges.* Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1991, 29)

In the final analysis, the concept of collaborating for the common good is not really a new one in higher education. Despite the proliferation of specializations and specialists, there is already a significant degree of collaboration that takes place in our institutions. One wonders, however, given the research on learning outside of the classroom, and the benefits to be gained by both students and their institutions, why more collaboration does not take place. With programs being implemented on our campuses such as learning communities, first-year experience programs, and service learning programs, we are perhaps at a critical juncture if we aim to make collaboration one of the hallmarks of higher education in the twenty-first century. If institutions are, in the words of Boyer, "In Search of Community," and if we are truly concerned about "the common good," perhaps we are prepared to fully commit ourselves to the ideal of collaboration in the academy (Boyer, 1990).

With this as the overall philosophical framework, this presentation will focus on the interpretation of collaboration from the perspectives of a president, a chief academic officer, and a chief student affairs officer. Specific strategies utilized to advance this approach, examples of collaborative efforts from three institutions, and perceived and realized benefits will be shared.

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A New Path–
Collaborating Outside Our Four Walls: The Good, the Risky, and the Oh-Oh!

Jane Toot

Introduction

This is an era of decreasing resources and increasing expectations in two segments of our professional community, health care and higher education. When these two groups are involved with one another, such as in a teaching hospital, the needs can be exacerbated. However, the rewards can be significant when the involved parties forge creative alliances and exhibit a commitment to merge resources and jointly design programs.

Description

Such a commitment was undertaken in Grand Rapids approximately two years ago. In the fall of 1999, two universities and three other organizations–Grand Valley State University (GVSU), including the School of Health Professions and Kirkhof School of Nursing; Michigan State University (MSU) College of Human Medicine; two health care systems, Spectrum Health and St. Mary's; and a center for graduate medical education–put their heads and their resources together to form a new entity, which they named the Grand Rapids Medical Education and Research Center for Health Professions (MERC). The mission of this consortium is to enhance the health of the Grand Rapids community through the integration of high quality graduate medical education programs, medical student education programs, continuing education and continuing medical education programs, health professions education, and research relevant to the population of West Michigan (Springer, 2000).

Through the creation of this consortium, which addresses education and research on a region-wide basis, health care systems and universities are crossing boundaries in a noncompetitive manner. The first year of operation has been a challenging learning experience as members have charted a new path for integrated medical and health professions education and research.

Activities (Current and Proposed)

In the formation of MERC, several cultures, which previously operated under very different goals and objectives in regard to research and education, have been brought together. Each organization not only has focused upon its own agenda, but also has been successful by utilizing its own tried and true strategies. Not only does MERC need to bring these disparate groups to a shared vision, it must also develop environments that are appropriate and productive for each participant.

The general criteria for membership include (1) being a nonprofit organization; (2) having a part of the mission address medical education, health professions education, and/or research; and (3) being committed to improving the health of the residents of west Michigan. As the organization was structured, the board and all committees have representation from all of the full members.

MERC is intent on the development of clinical research in west Michigan. One step toward this is the formation of a citywide institutional review board (IRB). Another anticipated support piece for clinical research, as well as education, is the development and improvement of library services.

It is believed that MERC will foster new educational opportunities through the increase of educational links between and among campuses and health care centers. One such opportunity is the use of joint faculty clinical appointments. As has been indicated, MERC is already serving as a clearinghouse for scheduling clinical rotations for the medical school, some portions of the nursing program, and the physician assistant program. It is anticipated that this activity may expand to serve other health professions.

MERC is focusing on faculty as well as student development. The College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University already uses problem-based learning (PBL). Such an approach is in the developmental stages in the School of Health Professions at GVSU. The faculty (both in-house and at the clinical sites) will require significant instruction. Furthermore, as MERC moves into interdisciplinary study with medical students, nurses, and other health professions, faculty development will receive considerable attention.

Accomplishments

MERC can claim numerous accomplishments in a short time span. Significant among these is (1) placing several students into clinical rotation in the disciplines of medicine, nursing, and physician assistant; (2) developing and implementing an efficient budget, which saved the hospital members ten percent; (3) increasing the quality and quantity of researchers for the research team; and (4) working on the establishment of a city-wide Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Challenges

While MERC has had an effective beginning, several challenges remain for this unique organization. Interdisciplinary and interinstitutional (health and educational) cultures involved with MERC must strive to develop integrated programs where appropriate. The citywide IRB has still to establish policies and procedures acceptable to all participants. It is clear that such a board will do much to expedite the approval of research projects; however, the diversity of rules and procedures in each institution make this a very complex proposal. Attention to disciplines beyond medicine has yet to occur as far as integrated research, continuing education, and education are concerned. Finally, the parameters of membership and the ramifications for involved organizational structures require clarification.

The Problem

As has been mentioned, during this founding period, MERC has accomplished several objectives regarding the educational and research environments for medical residents and students. In clinical education, more than 500 students of medicine, nursing, and physician assistants have been placed. MERC has also made some changes in the procedures for the annual research presentation day so that allied health professionals and nursing students can participate. However, there have been no interdisciplinary efforts beyond this. The members do not view this as a lack of interest or intent on the part of MERC. Rather, it is considered a developmental stage for a work in progress. It is recognized that the shift from a paradigm of medical education to medical and health professional education will require significant degrees of flexibility and cooperation across disciplines and professions.

Accordingly, for this organization to maintain its momentum, a formalized process utilizing interdisciplinary/interinstitutional work teams should become standard operating procedure. Rather than just identifying projects, MERC needs to concurrently expend efforts on the process of working together toward reaching these objectives. Initially, this will be time consuming and difficult, but as stakeholders become familiar with the process, goals and objectives will be more efficiently reached and maintained.

Step One: Communication

A foundation of communication to support teamwork has been laid with the board of directors, the academic council, the continuing medical education committee, and the graduate medical education committee. While these groups have dealt primarily with issues surrounding education and research as they pertain to medical students and residents, their membership has brought an interdisciplinary viewpoint to the discussions. This interaction has helped foster communication and allows medicine and the health professions to gain knowledge about each other's educational philosophies, strategies, goals, and objectives.

Step Two: Team Building

A second step toward this interactive process of teaming is the commitment to the use of teams. There are two areas in which work teams would be useful. The first is to have the board of directors participate in the definition of membership parameters and the ramifications for member organizations. Such an activity would serve as an instrument for the development of a collaborative team effort. The principles that the board members would have to bring to the table include a belief in:

- having a common purpose;
- fostering the involvement of stakeholders;
- developing joint outcomes from assessment;
- coordinating activities of implementation and evaluation;
- evaluating the effectiveness of their own team.

The group must recognize that the process, rather than the final product reflects the success of a team. As this work evolves, the board will see how this process can be utilized to approach other issues and problems that come before the organization.

The second area in which a work team could be advantageous is the academic council. This group is the logical body to propose and review educational and research directions for the organization. As in the case of the board, the council members must bring the same principles that foster collaborative team building to the discussions.

Step Three: Conflict Management

Finally, it is a truism that conflict is a fact of life. This is particularly true during organizational change. One author has likened the stages of organizational change to traveling through white water. Those of you who kayak or canoe can relate to this analogy. In this organization, where each member may have to lose some individual control in order to see long-term advantages, the likelihood of conflict is very real. The team facilitator and the member representatives must be very aware of the nature of conflict and know how to address it productively. Each member has probably been through conflict management, but providing succinct handouts would be helpful.

Conclusion

The potential of MERC is significant. It brings a unique dimension to the education and research activities for health care professionals in west Michigan. Realization of this potential is highly dependent on the ownership felt by the stakeholders. To create that sense of belonging requires each subgroup to do meaningful work. The team approach can provide the necessary environment for success as work groups address presented challenges.

Is this type of collaboration good? Yes. Even in these early stages, we have seen better and increased communication, significant savings, more efficient clinical placements, and the very real potential for a citywide IRB.

Is there a risk? Certainly, this is a possibility when several organizations combine to embark on a new structure in which trust and collaboration must be present as some control and perhaps some income are relinquished.

The oh-ohs? To date, these have been to the effect of facing unforeseen opportunities rather than an overwhelming negative surprise. Currently, we believe our future is as bright as we care to make it.

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Note

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Accel It!
Developing and Unleashing Creative Learning Potential In Your Classroom

Vicki Osendorf
Joan Barrett

Workshop Summary

Accelerated Learning is founded on the teaching methodology created by Dr. Georgi Lozanov, a medical doctor, psychiatrist, and educator. For many years, he was fascinated by how people learn and why some people learn faster than others. After many years of study, he concluded that the approach to learning was the single most important factor. He singled out very simple, yet, when applied to education and learning, very profound elements. Dr. Lozanov knew intuitively and experientially 40 years ago what is in fact the neurological and psychological way that we best learn.

When asked to consider what makes a person intelligent, a common response may be a person's ability to solve problems, utilize logic, and think critically. These typical traits of intelligence are sometimes lumped together under the label of "raw intelligence." A person's intelligence, traditionally speaking, is contained in his or her general intellect, how each comprehends, examines, and responds to outside stimuli, whether it's solving a math problem or anticipating an opponent's next move in the game of tennis. Our intelligence is our singular, collective ability to act and react in an ever-changing world.

According to Lyelle Palmer, Professor of Education and Director of the Office of Accelerated Learning at Winona State University in Minnesota, the Accelerated Learning approach "adapts the presentation to the way people's minds really work." Dr. Palmer says that actual techniques and principles used in Accelerated Learning are not new, and many have been researched and used for years. He goes on to say that what is new is the total package and the sequence of presentation aided by the consistency of the teacher in preparation, presentation, and engagement of students."

Learning Cycle Optimized Learning

- Creates a relaxed but attentive state of mind
- Presents big picture overview
- Presents material via three primary senses—visually, verbally, physically
- Activates the learner to store to long-term memory
- Demonstrates learning has occurred
- Reviews and reflects on what has been learned

Accelerated Learning is characterized by creating an environment that reinforces learning at both the conscious and subconscious level. Carefully selected peripherals in the form of music, art, visuals, and objects contribute to the overall learning environment. Care is taken to ensure conditions for optimal learning by creating a positive emotional climate that minimizes fear and threat and unleashes creative learning potential. Vivid memories are developed through fun, energetic, creative games, stories, imageries, and activities that significantly increase retention. Transfer of knowledge to long-term memory is facilitated by spending the majority of class time (approximately 70 percent) in application activities that stimulate the learning by immediate practice and feedback on new skills.

Topics Addressed in the Session

- Accelerated Learning as a teaching tool
- Practical application of Accelerated Learning techniques with the participants
- Training course for faculty--outcomes and plans to implement
- Question/answers

Presenter's Relationship to the Topic

Joan Barrett, President of St. Cloud Technical College, and Vicki Osendorf, Program Manager for the Supervisory Management Program at the St. Cloud Technical College co-present. President Barrett shares her perspective on how Accelerated Learning benefits the entire campus. Vicki Osendorf, project manager and instructor for Accelerated Learning, shares outcomes of the two-credit course.

The Need to Accel It!

Many instructors are feeling pressured. Information is increasing exponentially. Higher educational expectations are coming from business and society, and budget restrictions are increasing. Demands are being placed on colleges to accomplish more in less time with quality results. The answer may lie in the program design and teaching methods that optimize the use of classroom contact time.

Research Base

Accelerated Learning is a systematic way of organizing and presenting instruction to stimulate different learning and processing styles. According to Howard Gardner (1999), Accelerated Learning has been described as "whole mind, whole body learning" that includes the following characteristics:

- Engages both left-brain and right-brain activity
- Uses the conscious and subconscious mind
- Engages each of the senses, stimulating the body as well as the mind
- Addresses different learning and processing styles

Intelligence has been commonly regarded as general mental capacity comprised of logical and linguistic abilities. Some believe that intelligence is fixed at birth for life. In contrast, Howard Gardner's (1999) definition of intelligence is "an ability to solve a problem, fashion a product, devise a process or provide a service that members of a culture would value, including problem finding." Gardner believes that intelligence is a combination of fixed ability and developmental learning based on experience and reflections and can therefore be modified throughout life. The intelligences identified by Gardner (1983, 1999) include:

1. Logical-mathematical—using reasoning and notational language efficiently
2. Verbal-linguistic—expressing and communicating skillfully in speech or in writing
3. Visual-spatial—visualizing and representing skillfully; maneuvering and traveling
4. Body-kinesthetic—playing sports, conveying emotions, and using tools

5. Musical-rhythmic–playing a musical instrument, using musical notations, or composing music
6. Intrapersonal–understanding oneself, one's motivations and behaviors
7. Interpersonal–using one's sensitivity to other's moods, motivations, and intentions
8. Naturalist–ability to identify and classify patterns in nature

Gail Heidenhain (2000), Delphin Leading by Learning consultant, defines Accelerated Learning as design technology; a way to facilitate that takes in the needs of students, and what the instructor needs to teach, and creates the best learning environment. She goes on to say that Accelerated Learning should be called *enhanced learning* as the learning comes faster at a slower pace, using all of the senses.

The teacher's role is to act as a guide, so that each participant can discover from within that person who has fun learning, who can relax, and who can use imaginative powers to learn, create, retain, interconnect, and do creative problem solving. The teacher sets up the environment and classroom that eliminates threat. Students become emotionally involved with learning and with other participants. We are now aware that emotions are critical to learning. Some neurologists believe that there are no memories without emotions. The instructor is a key element, not as a holder of all knowledge, but as a guide who gently and with great assurance leads the students to become empowered. Instructors become learner-centered, and the implications for learning are vast.

Knowledgeable college and high school faculty and teachers of every level throughout North America, Europe, Asia, South America, Africa, and Australia now frequently use Accelerated Learning. Dr. Lozanov says fun, relaxation, imagination, and emotional involvement are the elements that create the most transformation and increase the ability to learn and retain.

Traditional measures of intelligence in education assumed that our ability to learn and do things comes out of a uniform cognitive capacity. Student ability has been measured using IQ tests such as the Stanford-Binet test and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). One might say that the dictates of American education today were based on student's scores on a battery of intelligence tests taken from kindergarten through postsecondary. Advocates of traditional education continue to push this paradigm of Uniform Schooling, which is an educational system based on national standards and efficient, cost-effective assessment in the form of multiple-choice examinations with a number two pencil.

Dr. Gardner first introduced the theory of multiple intelligences in *Frames of Mind* (Gardner, 1983). He has been heavily involved in school reform efforts in the United States. In 1986 he began to teach at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and continues his work today. Gardner said in *NEA Today* (March 2000) that:

> Multiple intelligences (MI) is a psychological theory about the mind. It's a critique of the notion that there's a single intelligence which we're born with, which can't be changed, and which psychologists can measure. It's not based on test correlations, which most other intelligence theories are based on.
>
> The claim is that there are at least eight different human intelligences. Most intelligence tests look at language or logic or both–those are just two of the intelligences. The other six are musical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist.
>
> I make two claims. The first claim is that all human beings have all of these intelligences. It's part of our species definition. The second claim is that, both because of our genetics and our environment, no two people have exactly the same profile of intelligences, not even identical twins, because their experiences are different.
>
> This is where we shift from science to education. If we all have different kinds of minds, we have a choice. We can either ignore those differences and teach everybody the same stuff in the same way and assess everybody in the same way. Or we can say, look, people learn in different kinds of ways, and they have different intellectual strengths and weaknesses. Let's take that into account in how we teach and how we assess.
>
> So, how should teachers who believe in your theory change their approach to teaching? Multiple Intelligence is a tool. It's not a goal. That means that you have to decide what you want to teach, and that should be based on what you think is important. In my own work, I'm a proponent of teaching for understanding, which means going deeply into topics so that students can really make use of knowledge in new situations. This is very, very different from most teaching, where people memorize material and can reproduce it on demand, but can't make use of it in new situations. That's what understanding entails. If you favor education for understanding the way I do, then MI can be extremely helpful. Because when you are teaching a topic, you can approach the topic in many ways, thereby activating different intelligences.

> You can see that I'm very much in opposition to the current state and national trends, which create more tests, often of a short-answer sort, favoring coverage or non-coverage and not probing deeply into what people really understand. ... Frankly I don't care what intelligence or intelligences people have. I care whether they can do things which we value in our culture. ... I think our assessments ought to focus on the kinds of things we want people to understand, and they ought to give people a chance to perform their understandings. ... Assessment is fine. Even standardized assessment is fine, if it looks at things which are important and allows us to probe in-depth what people understand.

Implementing Accel

In 2000, the Supervisory Management Advisory Board at the St. Cloud Technical College assisted the faculty in reviewing courses, assisted in determining which courses would be merged, and identified new names for these courses. They reviewed and assisted in modifying course syllabi. Their input was invaluable as they shared their perspective from a business standpoint.

In February, March, and April 2001, instructors from various disciplines throughout the campus who teach the Supervisory Management program are participating in a two-credit training program for Accelerated Learning (Accel It!). Upon successful completion, they will be certified to teach in the accelerated format.

Following the training, instructors will work in teams to convert curriculum from the standard format to an accelerated one. The Supervisory Management program will formally convert to an Accelerated Learning format in fall 2001.

The college seeks to become a training resource center for Accelerated Learning for the State of Minnesota. Interested faculty and staff would meet or communicate on an ongoing basis to read related publications and discuss ideas. In the process, they would continue to examine their own intelligences and how that effects their style of teaching. We want to create a clearinghouse where instructors can share and discover new ideas from others. We believe this network would support instructors in implementing the newly learned concepts.

If there are students you are not reaching, or if you struggle with getting your topic across clearly, give some Accelerated Learning concepts a try and see if they make a difference. Gardner said in his interview with NEA: "Indeed I often say that if anybody doesn't believe in multiple intelligences they should go on an automobile ride with three different people and get totally lost and see how each person tries to get back home. Often that experience will make them an instant convert to the theory of multiple intelligences. People do not think the same way."

Case Study on Accelerated Learning

Marla Amborn, currently at Century College in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, applied Accelerated Learning concepts to Supervisory Management Programs in the Wisconsin postsecondary system. Students participated in a cohort and reported benefitting from:

- teaching methodologies that built self-esteem and critical thinking skills while optimizing learning styles and skills;
- a collaborative student experience that built team skills readily transferable to the workplace;
- employer involvement and ownership in helping participants to successfully develop skills needed to advance in their career;
- being able to earn an associate degree on a part-time basis in less time than the traditional approach (two-and-a-half rather than six to seven years);
- a pre-determined schedule that students can depend on with no canceled classes, a consistent class meeting time, and a graduation date identified before they enroll in their first class.

The College benefited from:

- increased graduation rates for Supervisory Management students;
- improved teaching skills of instructors who can use accelerated methodology in other program areas and business and industry training;

- less staff time lost by setting up classes, promoting them, ordering books, etc., and then having to cancel the class;
- more productive working relationships with local employers;
- public perception as an innovative leader in education responsive to the changing needs of employers;
- the ability to compete with other postsecondary institutions in the area that offer similar programs.

Employers in the community benefited from:

- developing fully-trained supervisors in less time;
- working closely with their employees to develop the specific skills needed in their workplaces;
- class assignments used to accomplish projects needed by the company;
- a greater pool of fully trained supervisors who are graduates of the Supervisory Management Program in the local workforce.

Further Case Studies

With the implementation of Accelerated Learning, graduation rates for the Supervisory Management Program at Lakeshore Technical College in Wisconsin increased from 3-4 to 30-36 graduates per year. This increase in the graduation rate accounted for 90 percent of the students enrolled in the program. Accelerated Learning proved to be one of the best methods of delivery for adult students because it can cut the student contact time in half. The Wisconsin Technical College Board has approved guidelines for Accelerated Learning that require the same course competencies be achieved as in the standard length program.

Mindy Kornhaber at Project Zero has been investigating 42 different schools that have been using MI theory for at least three years. Those schools report a lot of success with students on both hard measures—how they do on tests—and on softer measures, like absenteeism.

David Meier and Mary Jean Gill did a study at Bell Atlantic in which they converted standard courses to an accelerated format. Training time was cut in half, while job performance and student satisfaction increased substantially.

Charles Connley at Iowa State University routinely dismisses his class at midterm, having covered more materials than other professors who teach the same course. His students regularly perform at equal or greater levels on final exams.

There is a training workshop called The Accounting Game in which participants use the transactions of a lemonade stand to learn the principles of accounting. In a one-day workshop, they cover all of the principles typically taught in an introductory college accounting course.

Dramatic results have been found when applying Accelerated Learning methods to the study of foreign language, reducing the time it takes to learn a foreign language from years to months.

Conclusions

Based on research and demonstrated results, we believe that Accelerated Learning is a teaching methodology that is well worth pursuing. Our hope is to first reach those students who struggle and have a difficult time understanding, and to enable all students to fully involve themselves in the learning process and experience a new joy in learning. St. Cloud Technical College seeks to create a learning community that values and celebrates diversity.

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Appendix

Accelerated Learning

Resources

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Leading expert on the theory of Multiple Intelligences

Winona State University
Dr. Lyelle Palmer
Department of Special Education
Office of Accelerated Learning
Winona, MN 55987
507-457-5366
Conducts undergraduate and graduate courses in Accelerated Learning and sponsors annual conference.

St. Cloud Technical College
Vicki Osendorf, Supervisory Management
Dr. Joan Barrett, President
1540 Northway Drive
St. Cloud, MN 56303-1240
320-654-5000
vao@cloud.tec.mn.us
NCA workshop presenters. Currently converting Supervisory Management Program to Accelerated Learning.

Center for Accelerated Learning
Dave Meier
1103 Wisconsin Street
Lake Geneva, WI 53147
262-248-7070
www.alcenter.com
Trainer and consultant on Accelerated teaching methods.

Century College
Marla Amborn
Continuing Education and Customized Training
3300 Century Avenue North
White Bear Lake, MN 55110
651-779-3940
Trainer and consultant on Accelerated teaching methods.

Lakeshore Technical College
Robin Butler, Supervisory Management
George Grinde, Dean of Business and Marketing
1290 North Avenue
Cleveland, WI 553015
414-458-4183
Developed first Accelerated Learning Supervisory Management Program in Wisconsin Technical College system.

International Alliance for Learning
Dr. Nancy Omaha Boy, President
Box 26175
Colorado Springs, CO 80936
800-426-2989
www.ialearn.org
International Organization specializing in Accelerated Learning.

Journal for the Society of Accelerated Learning
Rutgers University
406 Penn Street
Camden, NJ 08102
http://camden-www.rutgers.edu/Camden/TEC/JALT/JALT.html
Journal connected to the International Alliance for Learning and Teaching

Creative Training Techniques International
The Bob Pike Group
7620 West 78th Street
Edina, MN 55439
800-383-9210
Bobpikectt.aol.com
Trains in Accelerated Learning methods and provides various resources such as books and newsletters.

Lessons Learned from General Education Revision

William D. Jenkins
Janice G. Elias

The process of general education reform began at Youngstown State University with a North Central visiting team report that identified YSU's distribution model as a concern. In the fall of 1993, a committee was appointed to examine the development of a goal-driven model. Seven long years later, in the fall of 2000, YSU successfully implemented a new general education model. The new model (shown in the accompanying chart) is a radical change from the department-based distribution model previously followed. It is goal-directed rather than based in the disciplines. It extends across four years, synthesizes more than one goal in each course, integrates general education into major courses, and provides a relatively similar experience for each student. This paper shares some of the lessons learned from this complex undertaking.

Ownership of General Education

In the fall of 1993, the Dean of Arts and Sciences appointed a college-wide committee to develop goals for general education. Although the Academic Senate approved the goals in the spring of 1994, there was much concern about representation on the Task Force that would continue the work. Traditionally, liberal arts and sciences have provided most of the general education. Professional schools, such as Education and Engineering, provided career-related education. Should decisions about general education be the province of those usually responsible for delivery? Or, because the general education program affected all students and programs, was it a campus-wide responsibility? Is the assumption that professional schools can't contribute to general education well-founded? Who owns general education in a comprehensive university?

Of particular concern to the professional schools were the pressures from accrediting agencies, employers, and licensure exams for specialized knowledge. The need to squeeze in content made these schools wary of any increase in general education credits. They also wanted supporting course work in the arts and sciences to do double duty for general education and the major. Since accrediting agencies are seldom as prescriptive as some campus programs claim, it is helpful to look at the organization's accreditation criteria. Nevertheless, faculty from professional schools have legitimate concerns about the balance between general and professional curricula. The provost and the Academic Senate recognized those interests by appointing a Task Force on General Education with representatives from all colleges. The result has been greater integration of general education with the major in four ways.

◇ **"Intensive" courses.** One component of the model, Essential Skills, requires students to take introductory writing, oral communication, and mathematics courses. Although basic courses provide a foundation, it is the recurrent use of the skills that enables a student to acquire proficiency. Because YSU faculty agree that students should develop writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills throughout the entire curriculum, one means of bringing the professional colleges into general education was the addition of "intensive" courses that engaged the student in skill-related assignments for 30 percent of the grade. These courses may be in the major and can be proposed by any department. Integrating these goals into major courses strengthened general education without drastically increasing the required credits.

Although faculty generally agree with the principles above, the application of these principles often conflicts with other beliefs held by the faculty that content coverage is more important than skill development, and oral presentations take too much time. The most difficult to fit in, according to faculty, is the oral presentation.

Hence, we have begun to consider whether the assignments might be spread over more than two courses within the major. For some departments the task is simple; they may already include these skills. For others it requires an adjustment considered too severe by some faculty members.

◊ **Capstone course.** Students must also take a capstone course in the major that requires them to demonstrate mastery of the essential skills. With the combination of general education, essential skills courses, intensive courses in the major, and the capstone course, students are engaged in significant writing, speaking, and critical thinking activities throughout the undergraduate experience.

◊ **Substitute courses.** As the model developed, an additional dilemma arose. Courses in mathematics and the natural sciences designed to serve a general student population were not appropriate for math, science, engineering, and health professions students. Their professional curricula already required a significant amount of math and science. An approval process was developed to review and substitute more advanced courses that also addressed the general education goals.

◊ **General education courses offered by professional schools.** One of the most significant changes was acceptance of the principle that any department could propose courses. Some liberal arts departments saw this development as a threat, while professional programs saw an opportunity. Faculty from liberal arts questioned whether professional school faculty were too technically oriented to provide general education. The solution was a proviso that all course proposals demonstrate that the course satisfied specific goals of general education, was appropriate for the general student body, and was accessible to non-majors. In addition, the Academic Senate approved criteria that provided a clearer definition of the goals. Using these guidelines, some professional departments have been successful in having courses approved for general education, and others have not. For example, the Department of Human Ecology course in nutrition was approved in the category of Personal and Social Responsibility. A course in engineering economics was not approved because it was too narrow and designed primarily for engineering students.

The Politics of Curricular Reform

There are many sad tales told about academic senates. Numerous committees have brought policy recommendations to those bodies, only to have them rejected. Committee members, who believe that they have studied the issues and made sound judgments, become angry and disillusioned when their senate colleagues do not endorse their work. Our Task Force recognized that success in the Senate would depend primarily on two factors: (1) the power of expertise, and (2) skill in consensus building. The first was easier than the second. The provost provided funds for attendance at national conventions, buying books, and bringing experts to campus. We were prepared to explain how and why such reform should occur.

Managing the political process was more complicated. The Task Force knew that its broad representation was necessary, but not sufficient, to build the consensus necessary for radical change. The members, therefore, conducted open forums, met with each academic department as well as deans' advisory councils, gave periodic reports at the Academic Senate, solicited written comments, and invited many individuals to attend Task Force meetings to discuss their concerns. In addition, the Task Force chair kept students informed through presentations at Student Government meetings. Another component of our strategy, as recommended by Jerry Gaff of AACU, was the presentation of reform in pieces rather than as a total package. We recommended the program to the Senate for confirmation in stages: the goals, whether to adopt a core of courses, the distribution of courses within domains, and the criteria for certification of courses within the domains.

A central principle followed was that no policy should go before the Senate before it had been fully vetted throughout the university. There were debates, and some changes, on the floor of the Senate, but all the key components of the new model passed. There is no doubt that this approach was time consuming and exhausting, but YSU did not have the degree of conflict experienced at some universities, nor was a restart required because the Academic Senate defeated the proposals. Taking an adequate amount of time for self-education and consensus building was essential. The new model passed the Academic Senate in the spring of 1998 and was implemented in fall 2000.

☐ Core Curriculum?

The path to a consensus was not always smooth. While there may be agreement in principle to the ideal of a goal-driven program, the "devil is in the details," and disputes did arise regarding core requirements and college autonomy. It is very difficult for a university to reach agreement on a core. The number of faculty with vested interests in existing courses and their strong discipline orientation make it difficult for them to agree that any single set of core courses best addresses the goals or to join together to develop interdisciplinary courses. When a single department attempts to secure a required course, others may question whether they are motivated by concern for the well-being of students or a desire to guarantee student credit hours and ultimately resources to the department. For example, the Political Science Department was concerned about the declining participation in elections. They proposed that a course on citizenship be required of all students. In addition to resource questions (the disparity between the number of sections needed and the number of faculty in the Political Science Department), many faculty felt that equally good arguments could be made for requiring other courses. The Political Science Department was unable to gain support for their proposal. Consensus developed that specific core courses would focus on the essential skills of writing, oral communication, critical thinking, and mathematical reasoning. The remaining goals would be addressed by student choices from a restricted number of courses organized into four domains.

☐ College Autonomy

Some individuals concerned about breadth suggested that students should not be allowed to "double dip," to count the same course toward fulfilling the major and general education requirements. For the same reason, others objected to department requirements that their students take specific general education courses. The Task Force, sensitive to issues of departmental autonomy, took the position that major requirements were the purview of the colleges and departments so long as all curricula included the required general education model. The College of Arts and Sciences voted not to permit students to count courses in their major toward meeting the general education requirements. The professional schools permit the same course to be used for both.

Resource Constraints

Faculty are idealists when it comes to what they teach. Often they fail to consider the relationship between curriculum and the budget. Thus, when general education reform occurs, a conflict ensues because only so many courses can fit into the model.

The Task Force consulted with the administration early in the process and determined that the university could not support a program that required more resources than the current one. That set the stage for two principles that were generally followed: (1) the portion of the curriculum devoted to general education could not be drastically increased, and (2) the individual components of the program could not require major shifts in resources. An early understanding of the resource constraints was essential to developing a practical model.

For example, one clash involved the computer science department, which believed that the goal "acquire, process, and present quantitative and qualitative information using the most appropriate technologies, including computers" meant that all students should learn the underlying principles of computer operation. They did not feel that the incorporation of word processing and use of the Internet in the introductory writing courses was adequate to meet the goal. In this case, the department involved was not able to convince the rest of the faculty that its ideal should be theirs, particularly since the department did not have the faculty resources to staff such a requirement.

On the other hand, there appeared to be widespread support for a required speech course. The Communications Department was enthusiastic, but the General Education Task Force was reluctant to increase the hours in general education and to face the problem of resources. The Communications Department appealed to the idealism of the senators and argued that the cost would be small. Other departments asked where the money would come from. Ultimately the Senate endorsed this addition to the model, realizing that some departments might lose faculty positions and budget to the Communications Department, which would need more resources.

The limitations posed by resources stimulated creative solutions and resulted in a model that is more integrative than it might have been otherwise. For example, with 13 goals and a ceiling on the number of courses, it was clear that every general education course would have to address more than one goal, and the goals would need to be incorporated into major courses as well. The resource constraints reinforced the development of a coherent program.

Program Administration and Governance

The design of the administrative structure and governance flows from the early decision that general education is not a program that belongs to any one college, but that it belongs to the entire university. To secure passage of the model, it was necessary to define the governing structure. A General Education Committee that approves courses and recommends policies was created. The committee includes a representative elected from each of the six undergraduate colleges, and one appointed representative from each of the five areas of general education. This representation constitutes a compromise between the professional schools and the usual providers of general education courses. The committee is chaired by the Coordinator of General Education who performs administrative duties and reports directly to the Provost. Although a dean of general education or general studies might have more power and funding, the Task Force believed that leadership should come from a faculty member. The administration has provided a modest budget, an office, and secretarial help for the Coordinator.

Recommendations

After seven years, YSU has made significant changes in general education. That process has been frustrating and difficult, yet challenging and stimulating. From this experience, we have culled the following suggestions for those undertaking general education reform:

1. Take adequate time for a self-education stage for a significant number of people on campus.
2. Be realistic about the length of time it will take to develop consensus on a new program.
3. Include university-wide representation on the committee that develops a new program.
4. Take time to understand the concerns expressed by the professional schools and disciplines and seek to find mutually acceptable solutions.
5. Develop the program in steps, seeking consensus first on the goals and philosophy as a basis for future decisions.
6. Clarify the resource issues to avoid developing a model that cannot be supported.
7. Develop an organizational structure that promotes university-wide ownership and governance of the program.
8. Determine the goals of the general education program before designing the model or choosing specific courses.

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Appendix

Youngstown State University General Education Model

Goals	Requirements
1. Write and speak effectively 2. Acquire, process, and present quantitative and qualitative information using the most appropriate technologies, including computers 3. Reason critically, both individually and collaboratively, draw sound conclusions from information, ideas, and interpretations gathered from various sources and disciplines; and apply those conclusions to one's life and society 5. Comprehend mathematical concepts and reason mathematically in both abstract and applied contexts	**A. Essential Skills** 2 introductory writing courses 1 oral communication course 1 introductory mathematics course (requirement may be satisfied by a higher-level mathematics course or score on the placement exam) 2 upper division writing-intensive courses, preferably in the major or minor 2 oral communication-intensive courses 2 critical thinking-intensive courses 1 upper division approved capstone course, usually in the major
6. Understand the scientific method; forming and testing hypotheses, as well as evaluating results 7. Realize the evolving relationships among science, technology, and society 13. Understand and appreciate the natural environment and the processes that shape it	**B. Natural Science** 2–3 courses* from a list of courses that meet goal 13 and in addition goal 6 or 7; one must have a lab component
8. Grasp and appreciate artistic expression in multiple forms and contexts	**C. Artistic and Literary Perspectives** 2–3 courses* from a list of courses that meet goal 8, and one additional goal
10. Understand the development of cultures and organization of human societies throughout the world and their changing relationships with Western society 11. Evaluate the impact of theories, events, and institutions on the social, economic, legal, and political aspects of society 12. Comprehend and appreciate the development of diversity in America in all its forms	**D. Societies and Institutions** 2–3 courses* from a list of courses that meet a combination of two goals from 10, 11, 12 **Number of courses from B, C, D must total 8*
4. Understand the personal and social importance of ethical reflection and moral reasoning 9. Understand the relationships between physical, mental, and emotional well-being and the quality of life of the individual, the family, and the community	**E. Personal and Social Responsibility** 2 courses from a list of courses that meet either goal 4 or goal 9 in combination with one other goal from 3–13
	F. Special Topics and Electives 1 course that combines goals in ways not listed above, or 1 course from mathematics, B, C, D, or E above

Common Courses and Capstones: A New General Education Initiative at William Jewell College

Randall Morris
Judith Dilts

This paper intends to introduce readers to the new general education initiative at William Jewell College. To that end we propose to provide a brief account of the transition we have made from a typical distribution model toward a sequential core, one that includes several common courses taken by students in their freshman and senior years. We will include enough information to familiarize program participants with the structure and objectives of the new program and conclude by identifying seminal issues to be addressed at the meeting in Chicago.

Until fall 1996, William Jewell offered students two options for satisfying their general education requirements. The large majority of students pursued a traditional distribution track. The courses satisfying general education were invariably discipline specific courses that were often created to serve the needs of the majors. This led us to reflect on our goals and objectives for general education and to ask ourselves whether this approach was enabling students to achieve them. Very often, the courses were intended to introduce students to the basic ideas of a discipline, providing thereby a foundation to be built upon by later courses in the sequence. While useful for students who would become majors, the educational needs and interests of the non-majors taking the course for general education credit were not immediately considered. Furthermore, each course was entirely self-contained, designed without considering what other general education courses students were taking. By the very nature of the distributional approach, this was inevitable. There was no way of knowing what courses students in your classes had taken or were likely to take in the future; consequently, it was impossible to construct a course that related directly to any other course in the curriculum. No effort was made, or even could be made, on the part of students or faculty to integrate the content of such discrete courses. Yet we claimed to be preparing students to enter a complex world in which issues are best addressed from a multitude of perspectives.

The distributional general education curriculum was not the only one available for students. A small number of students opted for a sequential program called Foundations for the Future. The Foundations program offered students a strict sequence of six courses that were team taught and interdisciplinary. The general themes of the program were values and decision-making, and each course had such a focus. Students chose to enroll in the Foundations program as incoming first-year students, and took the courses through to a capstone course their senior year. While the program was successful and offered to those planning our new general education program an excellent model (e.g., a program covering a student's four years, a capstone course, experience with interdisciplinarity), it was not adopted as the general education program for the college in large part because each course was team-taught, and we didn't have the faculty to staff such a labor-intensive program.

Finally, the basic problem that led to our revising the general education program at Jewell was assessment. How could we assess student achievement under the current distributional system in order to know whether our goals were being achieved? The assessment subcommittee of the Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee concluded that "the general education at William Jewell did not constitute a coherent and assessable program." They mandated the college to construct a new program for general education.

The process of revising general education began in 1994 and was implemented in 1996. The result is a thirty-eight credit hour program called The Responsible Self. The program consists of three tiers. The introductory level begins with a collection of courses taken by all first year students. In addition to the typical courses in communication and mathematics, all first-semester students take a seminar called The Responsible Self. The second level offers students a choice of interdisciplinary courses grouped around four topic areas: culture and traditions; science, technology, and the human experience; power and justice; and sacred and secular. Finally, the capstone course is intended to build bridges between the program's previous levels and the student's study of an academic major by applying questions of responsible, ethical citizenship to critical problems facing society. (The table at the end of this paper provides an overview of the general education program.) In addition to these courses, all students are required to complete two credit hours of physical education activities. B.A. students must also complete one intermediate foreign language course, and B.S. students must take an additional course at level II with a multicultural emphasis.

One benefit of the revised program is that it provides an opportunity to expose students to greater levels of complexity in relationship to themes and ideas with which they are already familiar. Our goal in the program is to introduce students to ideas and/or texts that they revisit throughout the program. In our presentation we will offer examples of this connectivity in two important areas, science and ethics.

Secondly, because students in later courses revisit ideas and texts introduced at an earlier level, we have additional means to measure student achievement. In addition to assessing student writing, we hope to be able to evaluate their critical thinking skills as demonstrated by their ability to deal with related material at a deeper level.

At the same time, despite the potential of the new system, we have been forced to recognize that faculty development issues threaten the successful implementation of this program. Whereas in our distributional model, faculty were able to use courses designed to satisfy the needs of their majors, they are now expected to develop interdisciplinary courses that meet specific general education goals and objectives. This asks a lot of faculty. We have discovered that not all faculty members have the ability, much less the desire, to learn and teach in an interdisciplinary program. And even if the institution has enough capable faculty members, the administration needs to commit significant resources to initial and ongoing faculty development. Finally, it is tautologically true that if you intend to use content matter to connect elements of a general education program, faculty members cannot design courses in isolation. This was one of the problems of our distributional approach. Faculty teaching in the new program need to carefully and deliberately link their courses to those that come earlier in order to build on the common experience of students. This has proven to be problematic. It impinges on faculty autonomy. There is a need for strong leadership, both from faculty and administration, to hold faculty members accountable to the goals and objectives of general education.

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Appendix. William Jewell College General Education Program

Level I

Students are required to complete each of the following courses before progressing to Level II.

GEN 100 *The Responsible Self* (4 credit hours)	**GEN 101** *Oral Communication* (4 credit hours)	**GEN 102** *Written Communication* (4 credit hours)	**GEN 103** *Math Model Building and Statistics* Or **GEN 104** *Statistics and Applied Calculus* (4 credit hours)

Level II

Students are required to take one course from each of the following categories except for the category to which their academic major is most closely related.

Culture and Traditions (4 credit hours)	**Power and Justice in Society** (4 credit hours)	**Sacred and Secular** (4 credit hours)	**Science, Technology, and the Human Experience** (4 credit hours)
GEN 200 *United States Pluralism* **GEN 201** *Divas, Death and Dementia on the Operatic Stage* **GEN 202** *Performance Studies* **GEN 203** *History and Philosophy of Science* **GEN 204** *Cultural Values and Visual Art* **GEN 205** *La Doulce France* **GEN 206** *The Chicano Experience* **GEN 207** *The WJC Fine Arts Program Events* **GEN 208** *Women Writers of World Literature* **GEN 209** *Cultures in Transition* **GEN 210** *Film Worlds* **GEN 211** *Seeing is Believing: The Iconography of Suffering and Compassion*	**GEN 275** *Social Problems* **GEN 276** *Human Development: Psychoanalysis and Literature* **GEN 277** *Deviance and Discipline: Crime and Punishment in Historical Perspectives* **GEN 278** *The Worlds of Islam* **GEN 279** *Economic Development and Cultural Change* **GEN 280** *Hitler's Germany: Problems of Power and Justice* **GEN 281** *Medicine, Money, and Morals* **GEN 282** *Constitutional Questions* **GEN 283** *Synopsis of United States History and Government*	**GEN 225** *Law, Gospel, and Moral Philosophy in the Traditions of the Reformation* **GEN 226** *Religion and Meaning* **GEN 227** *Religion, Meaning, and Reality* **GEN 228** *Religion as Literature* **GEN 229** *Christianity and Tyranny* **GEN 230** *Religion and the Holocaust* **GEN 231** *Biblical Messianism and Handel's Messiah* **GEN 232** *Relationships: Psychological, Religious, and Societal Perspectives*	**GEN 250** *Earthbeat* **GEN 251** *The Science of Fibers* **GEN 252** *DNA: Politics, Law and Ethics* **GEN 253** *Energy: Its Sources and Responsible Use* **GEN 254** *The Mind: The Master Pharmacist* **GEN 255** *Sports Science: Physics Applications and Ethical Issues*

Level III

Students are required to take one of the following capstone courses during their senior year, dependent upon completion of Level II.

GEN 401 *Birth by Any Means? The Ethics of Reproductive Technology*	**GEN 402** *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*	**GEN 403** *Plague, Piety, and Public Policy*	**GEN 404** *State and Society*

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Chapter 3

New Designs in Higher Education
New Designs for School/College Collaborations

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Chicago ENLACE: Building Communication with Stakeholders in the Latino Students' Education K–16

Joaquin Villegas
Santos Rivera
Estela Lopez

The College Board's 1999 Report of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement defines its primary mission as "to develop recommendations for how several segments of American society, ranging from senior higher education officials to minority parents, can work more effectively to increase the number of underrepresented minority students who can achieve at very high levels academically." The Task Force Report, entitled *Reaching the Top*, indicates that "in only a few decades, our society has developed a number of promising strategies and strong leads for improving educational outcomes for underrepresented minorities.... Nevertheless, much too little attention has been given by our society to the limited presence of African Americans, Latinos, and Native-Americans among the nation's most academically successful students. As a result, relatively few educational strategies have been demonstrated to help solve this issue" (College Board, 1999, *Reaching the Top:* A Report of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement. New York: College Board).

In consonance with the findings of this report, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in 1999 launched an educational initiative under the name ENLACE: ENgaging LAtino Communities for Education. This initiative was aimed to increase opportunities for Latino children and youth to prepare for, pursue, and succeed in postsecondary education. Through ENLACE, Kellogg will strengthen efforts focused on Latino access to and success in college by:

- strengthening selected Hispanic-serving institutions, public schools, and community-based organizations to serve as catalysts and models for systematic change in education;
- supporting higher education/community partnerships that increase community involvement and educational success among Latino students;
- supporting the creation and/or implementation of educational models based on best practices that improve enrollment, academic performance, and graduation of Latino high school and college students;
- facilitating the expansion and sustainability of successful programs through strategic planning, networking, leadership development, and policy efforts; and
- disseminating information about and publicizing successful models to key stakeholders to stimulate changes in policies and practices related to the education of Latinos.

In order to address the ENLACE initiative and achieve its five objectives, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation delineated three stages or phases named: (1) identifying and developing partnerships; (2) implementation; and (3) institutionalization, sustainability, and dissemination to be pursued by institutions of higher learning.

Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) viewed itself in a unique position to lead Kellogg's ENLACE initiative in the Midwest of the United States. As a state-supported commuter institution and the only four-year public Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in Illinois, NEIU serves a culturally diverse student body of approximately 10,035, of whom 26.6 percent are Latinos. According to a *Black Issues in Higher Education* special report entitled "The Top Degree Producers" published in July 1998, NEIU ranks sixteenth in the top grantors of education degrees to Latinos.

In fall 1999, NEIU competed with 125 HSI members from the Southwest, Midwest, California, Florida, New York, and Texas. NEIU was awarded a Phase I initiative with a one-year planning grant in order to "formulate creative approaches and models to prevent high school dropout and support Latino/a youth to enter and complete college." This effort required a partnership with public schools and community-based organizations in order to include these community voices in the design plan to identify the strengths and assets that each partner can bring into the ENLACE initiative.

In spring 2000, NEIU became the catalyst force to convene groups of teachers, parents, students, and community-based business and professional people representing the full range of Latino cultures present in Chicago–Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central and South American–to address the barriers that prevent Latino students from achieving educational parity with the rest of American society. The Chicago ENLACE Partnership, as it will be named by the partners, targeted three critical issues that need to be addressed to improve the educational pipeline and increase opportunities for Latinos to enter and complete college: (1) the need to expand the existing college/community partnerships that address high school dropout to support the education of Latino youth through college; (2) the need to perceive the language and culture of Latinos as an asset in educational endeavors, not a barrier; and (3) the need to develop a concerted effort to involve not only individual students but also family groups in Latino students' goal setting and planning for postsecondary education and careers.

The Chicago ENLACE Partnership's operating structure was built on existing collaborative efforts that NEIU has had developed through its Chicago Teacher Training Center. Two clusters were organized in predominantly Latino Chicago neighborhoods: the North/West Cluster and the South Cluster. Each one of the clusters was constituted by high schools and elementary schools, community-based organizations, parents, students, and business organizations. Each had a Cluster Leadership Team to assure that the planning process was proceeding effectively and that a mechanism was in place to monitor the steps, expand the collaboration, participate in an environmental scan, and evaluate the ENLACE pipeline during the planning phase.

A Transition Council was also constituted of ENLACE partners from the admission offices and transfer centers of two-year and four-year institutions; Latino business leaders; and guidance and counseling staff from high schools, alternative high schools, and community educational service centers, such as ASPIRA and LULAC. The council was to provide advice to partner schools and organizations, and implement and expand dual admission and articulation agreements between community colleges and mainstream institutions. The Transition Council was encouraged to work closely with partners in both clusters.

The Chicago ENLACE Partnership made substantial progress toward building broad participation in decision making through community meetings, the formation of committees, and "inclusiveness interviews" of stakeholders in the community, soliciting their ideas and their participation in the initiative. During its planning phase, the Chicago ENLACE Partnership was composed of thirty-four partners in the following seven sub-groups: five elementary public schools, three public high schools, four alternative high schools, two business organizations, six community or junior colleges, one university, and thirteen community-based organizations.

The main focus of the ENLACE Phase I planning grant was to "formulate creative approaches and models to prevent high school drop out and support Latino(a) youth to enter and complete college." The identification of the barriers, strategies, and initiatives to address them were the result of more than sixty meetings with hundreds of individuals and stakeholders, many of whom experienced barriers in the pipeline, including former dropouts and pushouts from public schools. Latino staff from partner CBO's, alternative high schools, elementary and secondary schools, community colleges, and universities worked on six working teams in developing the implementation plan. The environmental scan involved seven intensive focus groups with Latino parents in the various Latino neighborhoods of Chicago and an equally focused input from students.

The completion of Phase I of the Chicago ENLACE Partnership encouraged NEIU to secure funding for the ENLACE Phase II: Implementation. Funding for four years will be granted to ten of the eighteen Phase I Hispanic-serving institutions. Grantees during Phase II are expected to provide evidence of a "coalition's ability to leverage change in higher education for Hispanics" (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 1999. *An Invitation for Proposals for ENLACE).*

To ensure the sustainability of ENLACE beyond the five years of funding, the Chicago ENLACE Partnership needs to link its local activities to other local and national educational agendas.

Northeastern Illinois University is on the right track to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century and to respond to the national goals for improving the educational achievement of Hispanic students; and more specifically to Goal 5—increasing postsecondary completion—and to benchmarking to this goal: doubling the percentage of Hispanic Americans who earn associate's and bachelor's degrees by 2010.

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The K–12 Kansas City Missouri School District– Higher Education Partnership: Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Robert B. Stein
Madeleine Kernen

Introduction

Urban school systems throughout the country are plagued with several challenges, including high turnover of personnel (administrators and teachers) and low student performance. As a result, the economic well-being of individuals, states, and the nation are at risk. Higher education's tendency to deny partial responsibility for urban school problems or to lay total blame on elementary and secondary school systems for low student performance and low college-attending rates underscores a lack of understanding about the interdependence between higher education and K-12 school districts. Increased emphasis on the connection between the level of education completed and an individual's lifetime earning potential has focused a spotlight on school/college partnerships, especially within urban regions.

Too often research and professional preparation agendas of college faculty and departments have defined the content of school/college partnerships. When this occurs at the expense of the educational needs of students and communities, the integrity of the process is at risk. Furthermore, while the unbridled competition driven by institutional aspirations and faculty career interests contributes to a rich diversity of postsecondary options, it can also result in a sporadic display of school/college programs. From the collective perspective of a K-12 school district, school/college programs may appear to lack coordination, concentration, and focus. Under these conditions, while individual students may be served well, the system as a whole may fail. Without an agreed-upon vision and a joint commitment between K-12 and higher education to systemically and collectively improve all student achievement at all educational levels, a shared responsibility for integrity in the educational process is missing. Repetition of unsuccessful behavior patterns in K-12/higher education relationships should be unacceptable. Experiences of one Missouri school district in forming new partnerships with colleges and universities serve as a case study to inform educators interested in designing new approaches to school/college relationships.

The Kansas City Missouri-Higher Education Partnership (KCMSD-HEP)

Faced with the typical problems of an urban school district and a desegregation battle that lasted well over 25 years, the Kansas City Missouri School District (KCMSD) has been in a crisis mode for several years. Ongoing lawsuits and a cantankerous and divisive local Board of Education supportive of the status quo have led to great difficulty in implementing change—a situation that is also largely due to an alarming lack of continuity in leadership.

On August 1, 1999, the current superintendent, Benjamin Demps, Jr., was brought into the district from outside the educational establishment (the military). Shortly after his appointment, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education announced that the KCMSD would likely lose its accreditation. Mr. Demps' fresh perspective, energy, and, most importantly, tenacity have served him well in working with a festering school district to try to foster a new way of doing business. The loss of state accreditation in May 2000 forced all stakeholders to face serious shortcomings in the district. While disagreements abound about which way to proceed and who is to blame, all operations have been called into question, including the relationships between the district and external groups, such as colleges and universities, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Coordinating Board for Higher Education. Under the leadership of the new superintendent, the KCMSD is seeking innovative approaches to regain state accreditation as well as to respond to court-ordered goals.

Several forces converged, thereby starting the process for the formation of the new partnership between the district and its higher education partners. The commitment of the new superintendent to experiment, the assertiveness of a regional university some distance from the district, and Missouri's K-16 agenda have each placed a spotlight on past practices concerning school/college relationships. Despite calls for more collaboration throughout Missouri's system of higher education, local Kansas City-area higher education institutions felt they had claim in serving the KCMSD. Not only were several programs already in place, but their close geographical proximity seemed to assure their jurisdiction. A regional university located in a rural setting some 100 miles from Kansas City expressed a strong interest in developing an urban residential internship for its students, whereby they could challenge assumptions about past practices. Although the goal was worthy, it had the potential to create tensions. Both the regional university and the KCMSD were strongly encouraged to involve greater numbers of colleges and universities in this and other projects. As a result, an expanded conversation about new initiatives within the district emerged.

These exchanges led to several informal discussions about the value of forming a consortium. Despite the best of intentions, however, colleges and universities found it difficult to move quickly. The high stakes associated with the loss of state accreditation sounded the district's alarm. On a very short one-week notice, Superintendent Demps called presidents and chancellors of all higher education institutions with an interest in serving the district to a meeting. Despite the short notice, several institutions attended this historic meeting on June 30, 2000, formally beginning the exploration of a new partnership formation. The message from the superintendent was quite clear. He was moving forward on a fast track with whatever institutions wanted to participate. The clock was already ticking, and he did not have the luxury of working with institutions individually. While underscoring the wealth of expertise within higher education, he decried the lack of synergism throughout the system and across educational sectors. At the second meeting, held in July 2000, institutions committed to work collaboratively with each other and with the district. As first steps, institutions were asked to inventory all ongoing projects with the district. The KCMSD issued a Request for Information, summarizing its needs: a listserv was established, and draft principles for the consortium were developed. The intent of these activities was to identify and better understand the existing opportunities for addressing the complex and multiple challenges faced by the district.

The name "Kansas City Missouri School District-Higher Education Partnership" (KCMSD-HEP) was chosen to give the group an identity. In addition to the district, partner members include seven public four-year institutions, the University of Missouri system, three independent four-year institutions, one community college, and the state commissioners of education and higher education. The new partnership was officially announced on October 30, 2000, at a press conference in Kansas City, generating extensive media coverage.

A primary objective of the KCMSD-HEP is to establish a more meaningful relationship among all members in supporting the agreed-upon goal of improving student performance. By pooling resources and coordinating communication, the KCMSD-HEP intends to improve the effective and timely delivery of services provided by higher education to the students, faculty, and administrators of the KCMSD. With the district's needs as the primary force, partners are seeking new collaborative approaches for the delivery of service. While ongoing projects are not being eliminated, KCMSD-HEP is helping to refocus, coordinate, and prioritize school/college partnership activities in the district. New projects range from Saturday school (to improve student performance) and an urban internship year in the KCMSD to alternative pathways to become teachers, ways to increase teacher retention, and ways to enhance the managerial skills of district personnel. It is imperative that these needs be fulfilled rapidly and directly in a concerted and coherent way. Moreover, the KCMSD must concentrate all of its training efforts for district teachers and administrators on those educational needs that directly impact its accreditation status and compliance with court orders. In sharing responsibilities and in promoting and implementing new designs in support of the KCMSD, the integrity of the educational system can truly be showcased.

Challenges Faced by the KCMSD-HEP

☐ Scope of Collaboration

Initially, new partnerships must decide about questions of scope and magnitude. While some members want to proceed cautiously and are more comfortable with limiting the extent of collaboration to a single project, others see the benefit of fully integrating new ways of communicating and doing business into everyday routine.

The KCMSD-HEP envisions a coordinated approach in which all members have access to the same information and may participate collectively in evaluating the available resources and identifying the deliverers of service.

☐ Setting the Pace

Collaboration requires integrating the perspectives of others. Early on, participants addressed the speed at which they would proceed. It was evident from the beginning that time perceptions varied greatly among KCMSD members. While short- and long-term goals have been established and the KCMSD-HEP is using a committee structure to identify solutions for the most immediate problems, new projects are being launched at a rate slower than some would like. With a commitment to move at a faster pace, institutions are raising money to hire a coordinator who will have responsibility for keeping KCMSD projects moving forward.

☐ Seeking a Common Language

Partners soon discovered that language can serve as a barrier when forging a new relationship. Without clear definitions of common terms and acronyms, communication was threatened. In working across institutional boundaries and educational sectors, KCMSD members have focused attention on the language used in formal and informal interactions to ensure inclusiveness and common understanding. For example, the term *faculty,* without a qualifier, may be interpreted to mean higher education personnel only. Educators, or K-16 faculty, more directly implies personnel from both sectors. Most recently, a briefing was held to provide greater understanding among higher education partners not only with the content and standards but also with the language and labels involved in the Missouri School Improvement Program (MoSIP), which is the state's program for accrediting school districts.

☐ Overcoming Competition

While interest in consortia arrangements is on the rise, colleges and universities have had a long history of competing with each other. The call for greater collaboration is often accompanied by accusations that loss of autonomy and hidden agendas will negatively affect the future of a particular college or university. Although insufficient for changing competitive patterns, the public agreement signed by the presidents and chancellors has sent a strong message to college and university faculty and administrators that partnering with colleagues at other institutions in the design of school/college projects should be considered normative rather than the exception.

Lessons Learned

☐ Structuring Inclusiveness

Genuine interest in using a consortia arrangement to restructuring relationships between colleges/universities and K-12 schools requires constant attention. Not only are colleges and universities required to blur institutional boundaries in meeting the challenges, K-12 partners are expected to have a major say in the design of projects that involve their schools, their students, and their staff. Engaging representatives from all consortia members in the development of new initiatives is necessary to increase ownership in potential activities. No matter how worthy, a new initiative developed "behind the scenes" by a subgroup of consortia members can threaten a group's sense of trust and reinforce a return to competitive behavior.

☐ The Use of Space

An overlooked element that affects relationships between and among consortia members involves the use of space during consortia meetings. Where meetings take place and room setups are symbolic messages about the roles and responsibilities of partners. Alternating locations and hosts for meetings has reinforced a sense of shared responsibility among partners. Controlling seating patterns through the use of placards has ensured that the superintendent and his staff, who are placed at the head of the table, are perceived as driving the conversation about the needs of the district. In addition, since institutions vary in the number of personnel they bring to the meeting, permitting each institution only one seat at the main table reinforces the perception of equity.

☐ Breaking with the Past

The request to change behavior patterns creates an image that past practices were rampant with problems. When individuals whose behaviors require change become defensive, they often feel a need to defend past practices. By acknowledging positive results from past practices and emphasizing structural changes as a driver for change, the superintendent is able to reduce defensiveness on the part of colleges and universities.

☐ Low-Stakes Information Gathering

During the early stages in the formation of the KCMSD-HEP, it was assumed that a Request for Proposals (RFP) process would be used by the district to get its needs met. It was envisioned that institutions or groups of institutions would respond to the RFP and that the best proposal(s) would be chosen. Because this process promoted unnecessary competition among partner members, the approach was shelved, and a Request for Information (RFI) process was used instead. The RFI, in contrast to the RFP, is structured as a low-stakes process. As a result, information about the KCMSD's needs and higher education's available resources and ideas to meet those needs has surfaced without forcing a high-stakes decision.

Conclusion

The KCMSD-HEP is a new partnership between a local urban school district and its higher education partners. A sense of urgency experienced by the district resulted in the superintendent's challenging higher education institutions to work collaboratively with the district. The Memorandum of Understanding, signed in October 2000, provides a foundation for changing the traditional behavior patterns that tended to foster competition among institutions; promote higher education-driven projects; and reinforce individual rather than systemic change. Members of the KCMSD-HEP are using baseline data to drive discussions about the district's need to improve student performance and to design new innovative approaches to sustain and enhance a quality teaching workforce in the district. As a result of intensive dialogue and information exchange, new understandings are emerging about the interdependence between K-12 and higher education systems. The KCMSD is still in a crisis mode for its survival. Through the work of KCMSD-HEP, the school district, college and university partners, and the state departments of education and higher education have accepted joint responsibility for the crisis and are working collaboratively to identify viable solutions.

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The Dual-Credit Explosion in Community Colleges

Hans A. Andrews
Joseph Cipfl
Robert Marshall

One of the most exciting and meaningful programs of cooperation between the secondary schools and the community and senior colleges in America in recent years has been the provision of dual-credit and concurrent enrollment options for junior and senior high school students.

In Illinois the dual-credit program is being offered as part of the answer and solution to the Affordability Committees' recommendations on how to contain the costs of higher education. This statewide committee was also seriously concerned about the large number of students taking from 4.5 to 5.5 years to complete a baccalaureate degree.

The following is a summary of the key findings of the study. The next paper, "Outcomes of Dual-Credit for Students," outlines the several types of models colleges may wish to set up with secondary schools and their students.

One of the newest and largest educational movements in Illinois and across the country is that of dual-credit enrollments for secondary school students. In 2000, research conducted at 48 public community colleges found a 240 percent growth in this program in Illinois community colleges. In some states this program is called *concurrent education.*

All 48 of the public community colleges responded to a survey to determine how rapidly this program was expanding and to determine the issues and the type of enrollments taking place at the beginning of the new century. Colleges reported that a total of 290 secondary schools were participating during the 1999–2000 academic year. This number was up from 120 secondary schools two years earlier. Why the large increase?

The Illinois Community College Board, with strong encouragement from the 48 colleges, made a funding change in 1996. It allowed the community colleges to submit credit hour grants even though the secondary schools were claiming the students as part of their average daily attendance. This means that colleges and the secondary schools no longer suffer a financial loss in the dual-credit program. With this financial barrier removed, the colleges have reached out to include as many secondary schools as wished to be a part of the program.

The dual-credit program received another push in Illinois when an affordability study committee raised issues about the length of time it was taking many students to get to a baccalaureate degree. The cost of such a degree was also mentioned as a problem. One of the recommendations was to expand opportunities to secondary school students who could benefit from accelerated programs.

Dual-Credit Defined

> *Dual-credit is defined as college courses offered to secondary school students who receive both college credit and credit toward secondary school graduation.*

Dual-credit classes were found to be offered in three major areas: (1) transfer courses that lead to the baccalaureate degree; (2) technical courses that lead toward an applied associate degree or a college certificate in the technical field; and (3) vocational courses that can also lead to the applied associate degree or a technical certificate.

The Dual-Credit Option for Students

Secondary school administrators and counselors are using the dual-credit option to challenge juniors and seniors in high school. The program carries college credit, very much like the Advanced Placement (A.P.) program that a significant number of secondary schools have had for a number of years.

Talented students no longer have to wait to finish high school before starting college-level work. For example, Marshall and Andrews identified a program at Marquette High School in Illinois that allows students the option of three or six dual credits a semester. The local community college provides the courses at the high school during the regular school day. Some students complete 24 credits during the two years, and by taking one summer session they can start their first full year of college as sophomores!

Course Offerings

Students who have special talents in art, computers, music, automotive, and other course areas are also enrolling in these programs across Illinois. The 2000 study in Illinois showed the following array of course options being the most consistently offered during 1999–2000:

Most offered dual-credit courses for **transfer college credit:**

English 101	22 colleges
Psychology, Introductory	17 colleges
Mathematics	15 colleges
History, U. S.	11 colleges
Calculus	10 colleges
Sociology, Introductory	7 colleges

Most offered dual-credit courses for **technical college credit:**

Cisco Networking	13 colleges
Mechanical Technology	9 colleges
Computer Information Systems	6 colleges

Most offered dual-credit courses for **vocational college credit:**

Automotive	14 colleges
Nursing Assistant	4 colleges
Welding	4 colleges
Electronics; Engineering Technology; Cosmetology	3 colleges

There were more than 80 courses listed in the summary of the surveys.

Quality Safeguards

The survey asked all colleges about their concerns relative to quality in the program. The top two responses were (1) placement testing to assure proper placement (and readiness) for courses; and (2) having faculty in the program who meet the qualifications and competencies required by the college to teach the dual-credit courses. In most cases, respondents mentioned that the same qualifications for full-time and part-time faculty were expected. Colleges used both full-time and secondary-school-qualified faculty in their programs.

Some of the other safeguards mentioned were: (1) having the same course syllabus as courses offered on-campus; (2) using the same textbooks as on-campus; (3) having department chairs observe the class(es) once a semester; (4) using secondary school counselor recommendations; and (5) using student evaluations.

Outlook

Colleges were asked about the future for this program. Most of the responses were very positive. Respondents called the program "a win-win program," "here to stay," and indicated that "the senior year schedule will look more like a college schedule," and "it offers stronger communications between secondary and post-secondary institutions."

Concerns

Concerns centered around maintaining the quality and integrity of the classes taught for the secondary school students. There was some concern that college faculty might lose some of their future enrollments. Transportation of students and union concerns in both college and secondary schools were identified. Finally, the ineligibility of high school students for financial aid and resistance of some secondary schools to the program were also mentioned as concerns. These concerns were fairly isolated, and none were mentioned by more than two or three colleges.

Summary

Illinois community colleges have experienced a 240 percent increase in the dual-credit program over a two-year period. A funding change made a major impact, and the number of secondary schools with students enrolled jumped from 120 to 290.

The prognosis for this program is strong. Growth is expected in the coming years. Quality issues were the main concerns. It appears that these issues will be addressed, which will make this a most acceptable program for students, parents, secondary schools, and the universities and colleges to which students will transfer their credits.

This outline focused on the Illinois dual-credit system. There are now more than 30 states that have been identified as having dual-credit and concurrent enrollment plans.

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Appendix

Outcomes of Dual-Credit for Students

Hans A. Andrews
Robert Marshall
Jackie Davis

The *dual-credit* program movement in American community colleges and secondary schools has expanded greatly in the past four or five years. In Illinois there was a 240% increase in the number of secondary schools taking part in this program from 1997-1998 to 1999-2000. In some states the program is called concurrent enrollment.

The importance of the dual-credit program is being documented in a number of states where it has existed for several years. It provides an exceptional option to secondary schools that wish to offer challenging programs to their honor students and to students who need to obtain technical and vocational background for the workforce.

Definition

Dual-credit courses, as defined here, are college courses offered to secondary school students who enroll and receive both college credit and credit toward secondary school graduation.

Outcomes for Students

The dual-credit program offers several *outcomes* for secondary school students:

- ○ An opportunity to enroll in advanced college-level coursework while still in high school
- ○ An opportunity to gain marketable technical or vocational skills not offered by the secondary school
- ○ An opportunity to earn up to one semester of college work prior to (or immediately following) high school graduation
- ○ An opportunity to earn up to one year of college work prior to (or immediately following) high school graduation
- ○ An opportunity to earn up to two years of college work prior to (or immediately following) high school graduation

☐ **Dual-Credit Model I**

Obtaining one semester of college work concurrent with high school graduation.

A student would enroll in *one course* per semester for each of the four semesters of the junior and senior years and one summer course *after* the junior *or* senior year.

15 credit hours: one semester

☐ **Dual-Credit Model II**

Obtaining one year of college work concurrent with high school graduation.

A student would enroll in *two courses* per semester for each of the four semesters of the junior and senior years and two summer courses either *after* the junior *or* senior year.

30-32 credit hours: one year

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☐ **Dual-Credit Model III**

Obtaining two years of college (Associate Degree) concurrent with high school graduation.

A student would enroll in *four or five courses* per semester for each of the four semesters of the junior and senior years and two summer courses *after both* the junior *and* senior years.

60-64 credit hours: 2 years (Associate Degree)

☐ **Dual-Credit Model IV**

Obtaining certification in a marketable technical area: e.g., CISCO Networking Specialist; Microsoft Certification, etc.

A student would enroll in one course per semester for each of four semesters of the junior or senior year.

12 credit hours: Cisco Certification, for example

☐ **Dual-Credit Model V**

Obtaining coursework in technical or vocational classes that leads toward a certificate or technical applied Associate Degree at a community college or into an entry level job.

A student would be enrolled at the college or secondary school to obtain credit in any of the college's technical or vocational offerings.

Credit: variable

Making It Work!

The dual-credit course option is a fast-expanding program between community colleges and secondary schools. In a number of states, universities and other four-year colleges are also a part of the delivery of dual-credit options to students. Some important things need to happen to create a quality dual-credit program:

- *Agreements* between community colleges and a secondary schools need to be worked out
- *Faculty* utilized in the dual-credit program need to be of the highest quality and must meet the hiring requirements of the community college, use college syllabus, and use college textbooks
- *Students and parents* need to learn how these courses *articulate* into the degree programs at community colleges and senior colleges or into employment
- *Counselors* at both the secondary school and college need to work together to assure students and parents of proper placement into the college coursework

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Bridges to Rural Nebraska: An Online Model to Address Problems in Early Entry Programming (College Courses in High Schools)

Carl O. Ellis
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with input from
W. Snyder
Joe Kincaid
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In many states, colleges are providing high school students with opportunities to earn college credit during their junior and senior years. These courses are offered in various forms and under different names, but they are usually taught in the high school classroom and involve some form of collaboration between secondary teachers and college professors as well as eligibility criteria for high school students and teachers.

The programs are increasingly popular. Secondary administrators love them because they can tell parents that their schools offer college credit; students flock to them because they can get an early start on their college careers; parents are proud that their children are "advanced"; and college administrators see profit.

However, the growing popularity of these programs has taxed the instructional resources of many colleges and raised disturbing questions about quality. Peru State College, in Peru, Nebraska, is experiencing those same problems: the College has not handled the growth in its Early Entry program very well over the last five years.

Problems

The problems can be categorized as follows:

(1) High school student qualifications

(2) Secondary teacher qualifications

(3) High school classroom environment

(4) College faculty ownership, control, and review of the early entry courses.

(1) High School Student Qualifications

The Nebraska Commission on Post-Secondary Education's "Guidelines for the Academic Transfer of College Courses Delivered in High Schools to High School Students" establishes six requirements that all students in the college-credit classroom must meet. Students must:

a) be recommended by the high school academic staff;

b) meet the prerequisites of the course;

c) have completed courses that meet the related high school subject matter admission requirements at the postsecondary institution where they intend to transfer the college credit;

d) have a cumulative grade point average of B, its equivalent, or better, or a composite ACT score of 22;

e) rank in the upper third of their class academically; and

f) be juniors or seniors.

Exceptions to requirement e may be made by the college official supervising the academic unit responsible for the delivery of the course.

The problem is that in order to increase their enrollments in these courses, high schools have been asking for numerous exceptions to the above qualifications, most often using teacher recommendations (a) to get around other requirements, especially d and e.

The college, in order to increase the flow of tuition dollars and to keep its program alive, has too frequently, even routinely, approved the requests for exceptions, taking full advantage of the provision that a "college official" may grant exceptions.

(2) Secondary Teacher Qualifications

According to the North Central Association's *Handbook of Accreditation* (2nd ed., 1997), Chapter 3, "General Institutional Requirements,"

> faculty teaching general education courses hold graduate degrees that include substantial study (typically a minimum of 18 semester hours at the graduate level) appropriate to the academic field in which they are teaching. (24)

This rule is relevant because the bulk of the early entry courses are general education courses. However, secondary faculty in early entry have been approved routinely if they hold a master's degree of any sort, usually one in education, even without the required "appropriate" 18 graduate hours.

(3) High School Classroom Environment

Small schools are the rule rather than the exception in depopulated rural Nebraska, and too often in these schools, students who are taking, for example, a history course for high school credit were seated and taught in the same room at the same time by the same teacher as students taking a history course for college credit. Obvious questions of quality control and legitimacy come to mind when high school and college students are mixed together and taught at once. Is a college text being used? Are college-level tests being administered? Is a syllabus appropriate for college credit being followed?

(4) College Faculty Ownership, Control, and Review of the Early Entry Courses

Referring again to the NCA *Handbook*, it is "essential" that "faculty have ownership and control over the general education curriculum" and that "faculty systematically and comprehensively review the general education curriculum." (24)

The *Handbook* goes on the stress that "the fact that the general education faculty might not be on the campus does not diminish the need for the institution to 'own' the general education program" (46), a direct shot at the tendency of colleges to establish early entry courses in secondary schools and then ignore them as long as the classes continue to make a profit and the next NCA visit is several years down the road.

Solutions

Peru State College was faced with all these problems. Several options presented themselves as solutions: faculty mentors, interactive television, and online. The only affordable and practical solution seemed to be an online model that, when fully implemented, will be a true bridge between the college and the secondary classroom.

The online model is relatively simple:

- On-campus, fully qualified faculty are paid a stipend by the college to develop early entry courses on the Peru State Blackboard server, thus establishing ownership and control of the courses. Faculty are also provided technical instruction and support as they create the classes, as recommended by the Draft Statement of the Regional Accrediting Commissions on the Evaluation of Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs (September 2000: 3).
- When the courses are offered to the high schools as early entry courses to replace the current model, the Peru State faculty will serve as the faculty of record and the secondary teacher will act as a facilitator.

The model, although simple, addresses all of the above problems:

- Qualified college faculty write, review, and revise the course content as well as randomly check the students' performance and production.
- The classroom environment problem is eliminated because the early entry courses now exist in a virtual environment.
- High school students no longer are being admitted to the program with exceptions.

Therefore, the online model:

- Gives the college ownership
- Ensures that the early entry courses are consistent with the college's mission
- Provides more opportunity to students, who now can take the classes at flexible hours and who are no longer limited in class selection by the availability in their high school of qualified teachers
- Keeps parents, administrators, and accrediting bodies happy.

Technology in this case clearly bridges two instructional worlds and results in a much improved instructional offering.

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A Small Rural College Collaborates with an Elementary School to Create a Professional Development School

Beth Musser
Earl Nicodemus

Description of Partnership Schools

West Liberty State College (WLSC) is located in the narrow northern panhandle of West Virginia between southwestern Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. Established as West Liberty Academy in 1837 (25 years before the state was admitted to the Union), it was created to respond to the need for higher educational opportunities west of the Appalachian Ridge. Currently, the college population is 2600.

The School of Education enrolls 900 students (35 percent). Of these, approximately 500 are elementary education majors. Program accreditation is provided by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the West Virginia Department of Education.

Madison Elementary School is located on an island in the Ohio River. Most of the 400 students (PK-5) live on the island. Madison Elementary is a Title I school receiving additional funding to provide reading and math support to all children enrolled in the school. Approximately 75 percent of the students at Madison qualify for the reduced-lunch program. Because of the commitment of school faculty and staff, Madison Elementary is a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence and has won other awards for innovative practices.

History of the Partnership

The Professional Development School (PDS) shows the greatest promise in education reform because it aims to advance teacher education reforms and school reforms simultaneously. The promise of PDS was the impetus for WLSC and Madison to collaborate in the fall of 1998. The Madison Local School Improvement Council (LSIC) and the Ohio County School Board approved the partnership with WLSC in August 1998. This relationship formalized and extended the work WLSC faculty had established through a clinical literacy experience for teacher candidates.

Funding for the first three years of the project (1998–2001) was provided by a grant from Dewitt-Wallace/Reader's Digest and NCATE. The WLSC/Madison PDS was selected as one of 19 partnerships nationwide to field-test PDS standards.

Best Practices Associated with the West Liberty State College/Madison PDS

The following concepts are part of the partnership:

- College instructors collaborate with the principal and teachers to select and assign student teachers to particular teachers.

- The college supervisor, cooperating teacher, and student teacher hold regular conferences (triads).
- Both college and school faculty teach preservice teachers in the PDS program. A curriculum and methods course is taught on-site at Madison by a Madison staff member and a college faculty member. The school principal teaches an educational psychology course at the college. Reading Recovery teachers from Madison meet with junior literacy students. The school counselor teaches a course at the college.
- A continuum of placement helps college students become a part of the community of learners. College students are placed as observers-participants in their freshman and sophomore years. Since 1993, all elementary majors have participated in a literacy (reading and language arts) program called Building Bridges. The Juniors and Seniors observe third grade teachers and create mini-lessons for small groups of third graders.
- By the time the college students are student teachers, they have spent portions of two or three semesters in the school and have become part of the school/learning community.
- Inquiry and action research are elements of the partnership. Teacher candidates and master teachers collaborate to facilitate student learning and carry out the goals of this partnership.

Governance

The PDS Council consists of the building principal, a parent, a teacher, the WLSC Dean of Education, a WLSC education professor, and a central office administrator. The Local School Improvement Committee (LSIC) is the primary decision-making committee, and the PDS Council is represented on this committee.

- **The four functions of a PDS.** The mission of a PDS is four fold: teacher preparation, staff development, practice-based inquiry, and student learning. The WLSC/Madison PDS has sponsored in-service programs for both preservice teachers and faculty. Action-research projects are conducted by student teachers. A faculty member received several small grants that she used to survey the attitudes of PDS student teachers and non-PDS student teachers.

  The partnership research has verified that student achievement has improved over the last three years. More research needs to be conducted in order to assess the impact of the partnership on student learning.

- **The NCATE PDS standards.** There are five standards, each addressing a critical attribute of a PDS partnership: Learning Community; Accountability and Quality Assurance; Collaboration; Diversity; and Structures, Resources, and Roles. The PDS Standards are intended for self-assessment. They are measures of process accountability, but they can also serve as tools for change and development.

Conclusion

In the December 1999 issue of the *Journal of Teacher Education,* there is an article entitled "Paradise Unrealized, Teacher Educators and the Costs and Benefits of School/University Partnerships." The authors state that "getting a partnership off the ground is relatively easy; sustaining it over a long period of time is not." The WLSC/Madison PDS has found this to be true.

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Chapter 4

New Designs in Higher Education

New Designs through National, State, and Community Initiatives

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

The Century Wall: Balancing the Benefits of Diversity and the Values of Community

Jan Fielder Ziegler
Sandy Davis-Baltz

Introduction

The Century Wall was officially unveiled on July 4, 2000, to the cheers of an enthusiastic crowd eagerly awaiting their chance to finally see, touch, and commemorate this public monument that had been so long in the making and in which community involvement was so widespread. Before the last festive balloon had drifted out of sight, individuals in the audience moved forward within the circle of the three sections of wall to gaze more closely and to marvel at the faces of Americans who had helped to shape this nation in the twentieth century. They pointed to the faces of those easily recognized—"There's FDR!" or "I see Oprah Winfrey!" and they noted with satisfaction, "I nominated him/her!" They gazed also at unfamiliar faces, many of them Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. They looked at the legend at the bottom of each wall to check the name of the person below Walt Disney or to the left of John F. Kennedy. When neither the face nor the name was recognizable, Century Wall visitors thumbed through booklets to learn the identity of the person, and why he/she had been selected as one of the hundred individuals depicted on this unique structure.

Background

Black River Technical College (BRTC) was one of forty two-year colleges nationwide selected in 1996 to participate in the "Exploring America's Communities: In Quest of Common Ground" project. Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Association of Community Colleges, the Community College Humanities Association, and Phi Theta Kappa, this project was designed to enhance the teaching of history and literature at the country's two-year colleges. BRTC's winning proposal included a plan to involve not only the institution, but also the entire community in a project that would promote awareness of the beauty and strength of this nation in the twentieth century, including the incredibly important diversity of our people. Because ours is a community—and an institution—where all minorities combined total less than two percent of our populace, we perceive this to be a particularly compelling need.

The project called for community-wide discussion and study to select 100 individuals who, in all the rich tapestry that reflects the people of this nation, had made a difference in shaping twentieth century America. The faces of these individuals, according to the original proposal, would be depicted on a large mural on a building in the historic downtown area. Although the plan for a mural eventually evolved, as did the location of the wall, the seminal concept remained constant: This would be a community undertaking to engage students, faculty, staff, and those outside the institution itself in a consideration of those who had an impact on the nation we have become as we end one century and begin the new one. The wall would be a celebration of America and the nation's endless human resources, including those from its diverse ethnic groups in the twentieth century.

Simultaneously, BRTC English and history faculty were working with the national project organizers and a specially appointed mentor to implement not only the wall component of our plan, but also to undertake extensive study and reading and attend national conferences. As a part of the project, we were exposed to current literature and ideas on infusing our literature and history curriculum with previously omitted writers and themes that better reflected the stories and the histories of all America's people, particularly those previously distorted or marginalized. These activities complemented our ongoing wall development by increasing our understanding and knowledge–filling in gaps that even we, as educators, had to confront.

Development of the Project

The task we faced was a sobering one: Who were these 100 people to be? How would they be selected from the thousands of individuals who had written the lines of the country's history in the past 100 years? Who would be so presumptuous as to make the decision? And how would we ensure that the final outcome would reflect the project's goals of inclusion of lesser-known, lesser-appreciated Americans?

To decide whose faces should be considered for inclusion on the wall, the Century Wall Committee members and BRTC English and history faculty began researching on their own while concurrently soliciting and receiving suggestions from individuals all over northeast Arkansas. Names of famous and not-so-famous Americans arrived in letters from historians at Arkansas State University and other institutions of higher education. We presented programs at the local Rotary, Kiwanis, and Women's Clubs, and received their nominations. Names came in from history buffs in nearby towns, from public school students, and from BRTC faculty and staff. Nominations were submitted through editorial columns in local newspapers. Names were submitted by men, women, and children of all ages at our booths at the County Fair, Maynard Pioneers Days, and the Old Davidsonville State Park Pow-wow.

The Century Wall was now more than just an idea; it was becoming real, long before anything tangible existed, made palpable by the slips of paper and letters and newsprint containing the names of hundreds of noteworthy Americans placed in nomination by the people of this and surrounding communities. All these names were added to the master list. Somewhere on this list were the hundred who would eventually end up, quite literally, etched in stone.

The Century Wall Evolves

Many obstacles, some of them seemingly unsurmountable, created fresh dilemmas on a weekly basis, or so it seemed to the Century Wall Committee. Months were spent wrestling with such issues as location–the ideal building would have open visibility but limited southern and western (read: excessive sunlight) exposure; surface–not every brick or stone would lend itself to a project of this exactness; life expectancy–depending on the elements, the mural might last seven to ten years, but it would look weatherworn after only a couple of years; and artists–lots of people wanted to do the project, but did not necessarily have answers for the obstacles. It was at this point that the mural idea metamorphosed into something far more durable and far more doable: We would create an actual wall using something–we did not yet know exactly what–and locate the structure, at the invitation of the Mayor, Parks Commission, and Chamber of Commerce, in the then-under-construction Black River Overlook Park where it would be in the heart of the community that created it. The possibilities instantly expanded, not only for realizing BRTC's goal of raising community awareness of American diversity, but also for integrating this outcome with the wonderful economic benefit to the community of enhancing the city's tourism and industrial recruitment efforts.

If this project as it was evolving was more doable, it was also more expensive. But by now community interest was so substantial that we were able to forge a partnership to fund the project. Funding was pledged by the college's Board of Trustees, the City of Pocahontas, Randolph County, and the community's three financial institutions.

A key step once the wall decision was made and projected funding secured was the selection of the college's own art instructor as the Century Wall artist. This artist not only prepared for the actual drawing of the faces, once the selections were made, but also took the lead in moving the project from just an idea to reality. We finally chose a specially prepared concrete block produced in Wisconsin, and located an engraver in Minnesota who could actually transform pieces of art onto the blocks' surface.

Selection of the One Hundred Faces

With assistance from the "Exploring America's Communities" project directors, the Century Wall Committee developed a set of criteria by which those names on the master list would be measured and weighed. Among the criteria were a consideration of the extent to which an individual had positively impacted large numbers of Americans; whether he or she had to overcome personal or societal obstacles in the endeavor; the extent to which overall and enduring quality of life had been influenced; and a consideration of positive impact on shaping the nation's acceptance of its diverse people. A committee of twelve (whose request to remain anonymous has been honored) sifted the names on the master list through the criteria filter, discussing, defending, discarding, voting, and eventually arriving at the names of those whose faces would comprise the Century Wall. Unable to narrow their selection to exactly 100, the group finally settled on a few multiple-face groups (the Wright Brothers, for example), resulting in more than 100 individuals, but producing 100 portrait entities overall.

From Concept to Concrete

The artist researched the photos in a tri-state region, relying on college libraries and, when no actual photographs existed, turning to crude drawings or Internet imagery. From these, the artist made initial pencil sketches. Using these sketches, she developed the placement, size, and view of each person, adjusting as necessary to produce an interesting yet easily readable design. Next came the actual ink drawings, which had to be extremely detailed yet scannable. To no one's surprise, this project, a monument of a century, dictated both old-fashioned handmade artwork as well as the use of computer technology. Once the faces had been completed, numbered, and checked for accurate placement, much as if they were pieces in a giant puzzle, the drawings were shipped to the Minnesota engraver. He utilized computer technology to scan the images, which were then sandblasted onto the surface of the special blocks. Interestingly, high-tech laser engraving proved too inaccurate for this detailed piece of art. The register marks were critical for the faces to line up evenly so as not to produce a Picasso effect. After the stones were cut, the lines were then painted with a permanent black medium. The finished blocks were shipped to Pocahontas to await construction of the Century Wall.

Amazingly, the three sections of wall, each of them approximately 7 by 15 feet, were completely constructed in less than a week. Throughout the construction, the townspeople watched with growing interest, because they had taken in the wall as a part of them. As soon as a section was completed, it was draped so as to reserve the final view for the July 4 unveiling.

Well Worth the Wait

From the moment of unveiling onward, the Century Wall has proven it has a place in this community. Together with the booklet, which is maintained in a "mailbox" on-site at the wall and is available free of charge to visitors, the Century Wall serves as a silent educator reminding all of us of the very real benefits of diversity and values of community. From its home on the west bank of the Black River alongside the main highway, the Century Wall stands facing the heart of the downtown Pocahontas area, beckoning those who pass by to stop, to think, to marvel, to enjoy, and to celebrate America.

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Economic Development: A Shared Responsibility

Carolyn A. Taylor
Sid Hudson

Purpose

Understanding the economic impact of colleges and universities has long been of interest to higher education administrators, policymakers, and public officials. Higher education institutions carefully walk the line between the pursuit of the traditional academic mission and the need for contemporary relevance–in other words, serving the common good.

Colleges and universities are increasingly promoting themselves as institutions that have impact on regional, social, and demographic dynamics; enhance regional economic conditions; and contribute to regional income and to the regional tax base. This potential for positive economic and social impact is likely to be perceived positively by governing bodies elected or appointed to distribute limited state funds to all types of important state programs as well as to institutions of higher education.

Universities and colleges play a valuable role in economic development, but that role is neither well defined nor easily understood. States and communities seeking to improve their economic fortunes are turning to universities to participate more fully in economic development. For their part, universities are promoting their own economic development agendas while trying to increase state and community support.

An Oklahoma Partnership: Higher Education and Economic Development

☐ History

Oklahoma's economic history and the emerging global economic environment are at odds. Globally, economies are becoming more dependent on human capital as knowledge-based industries replace the old physical capital enterprises. However, Oklahoma lags behind other states (1) in degree attainment and (2) in opportunities for research institutions and their faculty to participate in the private enterprise rewards for technology commercialization. The result is a shortage of high-paying jobs in Oklahoma. The Citizen's Commission for the Future of Oklahoma Higher Education reported: "Except for a brief period during the oil boom in the late 1970's and early 1980's, Oklahoma's per capita personal income has remained about 80 percent of the national average for half a century." The report recommended a new course when it indicated that an increase in the state's per capita education attainment and its ability to commercialize research outcomes would greatly affect the rate of future economic growth.

☐ Economic Development Grant Program

During 1997–1998 the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education convened a panel of Oklahomans to help set a direction for Oklahoma higher education. The Citizen's Commission on the Future of Higher Education developed a set of recommendations for the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education that included a recommendation that the State Regents should lead the way for greater direct involvement in economic development by Oklahoma higher education institutions.

At the urging of the Citizen's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, a three-part economic development initiative entitled *1998 Economic Development Plan* was approved by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education for use as a blueprint for more direct higher education assistance in economic development and is intended to "enhance the quality of life" in Oklahoma. The plan's central goal is to establish a stronger, more flexible, and responsive Oklahoma economy by more closely linking higher education's resources with the state's businesses, local communities, and public state and local agencies. The plan will strengthen Oklahoma's economic structure in three areas:

1. Ability to cope with fast-changing workforce needs of high-paying job fields
2. Propensity to develop areas of expertise in knowledge-based industries
3. Capacity to transfer research outcomes to the workplace.

In addition, it authorized a Request for Proposals to public higher education institutions entitled "Request for Grant Proposals: Working to Implement the Oklahoma State Regents' Statewide Economic Development Plan." Approximately $3 million was allocated by the legislature to fund the grants for fiscal year 1999. An additional $3.4 million was awarded for FY 2000 grants and yet another $2.2 million allocated for FY2001. The proposal's support works to:

1. Develop Oklahoma's workforce
2. Establish centers of intellectual excellence
3. Commercialize research outcomes.

This grant-making approach better positions institutions to lead the state's economic and workforce development into the twenty-first century, creating, attracting, and holding high paying jobs. This program has made 28 awards for a total of $8.3 million.

The program has:

1. funded the creation of technology transfer offices at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University;
2. helped institutions create academic programs in the areas of multimedia design, forensic computer science, biomedical/biotechnology, film and television industry, aerospace administration, workforce development, process technology, and information technology;
3. stimulated multiple areas of institutional cooperation and created more business-higher education partnerships. As an example, a $300,000 grant to the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center is building Oklahoma's pharmaceutical industry; at Tulsa Community College, a $236,000 grant is implementing telecommunications technology and semiconductor manufacturing programs. These awards, plus many others, represent a major step in building Oklahoma's economic development infrastructure by increasing competitiveness in key industries.

Survey Findings

Results from a recent statewide study documented the current role and activities of all Oklahoma higher education institutions and the extent to which institutions participate in selected economic development activities. All of the public institutions reported having a role in economic development. A large majority of the respondents stated that the major role was to provide employers with an educated workforce, fulfill the mission of the institution, provide leadership, build community partnerships, conduct research and share technology, assist with business development and share faculty expertise with the business community. As reported, over 90 percent of institutions surveyed noted increasing institutional activity in economic development over the preceding ten years. The findings suggest that institutions decide on the nature and level of their involvement in economic development activities in the context of a complex array of external and motivating factors. In addition, the literature suggests a strong correlation between level of economic development activity and change among selected academic policies.

The study identified "motivating" factors responsible for encouraging increased institutional involvement among public institutions. Factors such as point of view of the president, of business leaders, and of state legislators and government; having a strategic plan; wanting to improve public relations and image; transmitting knowledge through nontraditional teaching; increasing state appropriations; meeting public service obligations; generating new knowledge; and increasing corporate involvement appear to be the most influential. According to the study, the single most important key to successful institutional involvement in economic development is leadership. Entrepreneurial leadership by the institutional president is particularly important.

Recommendations

- Be specific in defining what "economic development" means for your institution in terms of fulfillment of your institutional mission. The goals of higher education institutional involvement in economic development activities must be clearly defined in terms of statewide economic goals, regional economic goals, and institutional goals.
- Document your activities in this area for the purpose, among others, of fulfilling your mission and preparing for your next self-study.
- Conduct an examination of internal institutional policies and procedures to identify barriers in meeting stated institutional, regional, and state economic development goals. Identify negative as well as positive costs associated with changes in internal policies and procedures.
- Build relationships, working partnerships, and improved communication with other institutions, business and industry leaders, and state government regarding economic development needs and strategies.

Conclusion

Mission statements define the basic character of all institutions. Every public institution in Oklahoma has an economic development function. Oklahoma higher education plays a key role in the state's economic development by customizing innovative programs and systems for business and industry.

Over the last two years, the State Regents have funded more than $8 million in grants for 28 economic development projects throughout the state, attracting over $25 million in matching funds. These economic development grants as well as other economic development activities have given institutions the ability to link academic programs to economic outcomes. Economic development grants can foster institutional change both as an institution and within an academic program.

The planning and implementation of this statewide initiative has strengthened Oklahoma's economic structure while supporting the state and various institutions to work together to fulfill the mission of universities and colleges in promoting economic development.

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Quality and Baccalaureate Curriculum Design

Neala Schleuning

Calls for change in higher education are loud and insistent: demands for a quicker response to train the nation's workforce, for greater flexibility and efficiency in delivery methods, for the adaptation of new technologies to education. Increasing competition in the information delivery "industry" requires us to be more responsive, to do everything better, faster, easier, cheaper. In this headlong rush into the new information-based economy, we have not sufficiently explored the impact of these many changes on the integrity and quality of the baccalaureate curriculum–especially traditional design principles of consistency, coherence, and the progressive and recursive development of cognitive skills.

Much of the contemporary literature on quality and accountability in higher education focuses on the application of industrial efficiency models in which the curriculum is subjected to the measurement of largely quantitative inputs, throughputs, or outputs. Concepts of intrinsic quality have been replaced by complex mechanistic models of quality-as-process-and-system. While this focus on the quantitative and measureable can provide valuable information for better managing resources, it ignores the more important subtle and qualitative curricular elements of structural integrity, thoughtful design and continuity, and cognitive integration across the curriculum. In our eagerness to measure ends, we have ignored the means that define a "quality" baccalaureate experience.

The Baccalaureate Curriculum

The baccalaureate curriculum has multiple objectives: it is designed to educate the whole person; to prepare him or her as a citizen and productive member of the community; to develop cognitive skills at an advanced level; and to initiate students into the practice of a particular body of knowledge–the academic discipline. Through careful design of the curriculum, the baccalaureate typically

> reaches beyond mere comprehension or acquisition of factual data or information to an awareness of its implications and meaning (breadth and depth). … Baccalaureate recipients possess advanced communication and literacy skills. … They recognize and deal with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty. … They are skilled in using various methods of inquiry: scientific, philosophical, problem-solving and artistic. … They are able to analyze and evaluate both quantitative and qualitative data to obtain meaningful information. They can integrate knowledge obtained from different sources and disciplines. (Academic Senate of the California State University, 1997, 6–7)

The primary objective of the baccalaureate is to develop higher-order cognitive skills; it is designed to teach students how to think, how to discern meaning. Baccalaureate curriculum design is based in large part on Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of learning development. Developed in the early part of the twentieth century by a large committee of educators that was chaired by Bloom, the theory has become the philosophical underpinning of most subsequent theories of learning and curriculum development. The taxonomy describes "levels" of learning and the orderly progression of learning from one level to another to achieve higher-order thinking skills. Its principles are applied at all educational levels and are so embedded in the curriculum development process that they are often unconscious.

Because the baccalaureate degree is designed specifically to develop cognitive skills, Bloom's formula plays a major role in shaping the design and determining the outcomes of a baccalaureate education. It assumes that intellectual skills can be taught through conscious curriculum design. This objective is accomplished by taking the student through an orderly, hierarchical, and recursive progression of coursework designed to enhance the cognitive skills. The idea of development, of progressing from one stage to another, one level of skill and ability to another, is at the heart of all cognitive learning theory. While Bloom's formula does not give us the precision to measure degrees of cognitive complexity, it does provide a broad outline and a map of the learning process.

Acclimating students to the academic discipline is a primary means of developing higher-order cognitive skills. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the discipline is "the act of teaching or instructing; that which is taught; instruction imparted to disciples or scholars." It is antithetical to the doctrine, or abstract theory, which is the property of the doctor or teacher. A discipline is both a subject area and the organized process of learning how to apply one's mind and intellectual skills to that subject area and by analogy to other areas of knowledge. A discipline connotes something broader than a major in that it reflects a general approach rather than content.

> "What then is the practice of the academic disciplines? . . . It is the practice of inquiry. . . actively aimed at satisfying the human desire to know." . . . *Mastery of subject matter may be essential to the mastery of an academic discipline, but the discipline–the inquiry–is what leads to knowledge.* Baccalaureate education is argument about interpretations. (Thomas Green, in Association of American Colleges, 1985, 28, emphasis mine)

Elements of Design in the Baccalaureate Curriculum

The baccalaureate curriculum was conceived as an integration of multiple bodies of knowledge, not merely the sum of individual courses taken. Broad areas of knowledge–general education, the major, and related minor areas–were to be integrated with one another in a meaningful way. A recent report by the Association of American Colleges and Universities noted that we have lost sight of this broader plan for the baccalaureate: "By allowing course credits to stand as a surrogate for learning, we have allowed ourselves to shirk the responsibility of developing a rigorous definition of what the baccalaureate degree should mean" (Schneider and Shoenberg, 1995, 19).

Traditionally, the baccalaureate curriculum is composed of several key components of design: integration of disciplines (particularly through a general education program), coherence at all levels of the degree, breadth and depth in knowledge areas, and levels of learning that reflect the progressive and recursive nature of knowledge. General education comprised one-third of the baccalaureate, and the major another third. The final third of the degree provided students some flexibility to study another discipline in a "minor," or to explore elective areas of knowledge unrelated to the major or in a field that was either critical to or supportive of the major. The enmeshment of these three basic building blocks provided coherence to the baccalaureate curriculum, and the breakdown of this coherence is one of the major issues facing baccalaureate education today.

☐ Coherence

The most important element in curriculum design is coherence. Related elements include the principle of sequencing (in some fields, but not in others), the relationship between core courses and electives, the integration of knowledge across disciplines, and attention to epistemological questions. Michigan State University identified the following elements of coherence in the baccalaureate:

> Coherence–emphasizes either sequential or lateral design of interrelatedness of courses; integration–emphasizes interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary within courses and sets of courses. . . between and among Core studies and the more specialized major. . . disciplines, then, become not just new bodies of information but new angles of vision; and synthesis–the frequent synthesis and reexamination of accumulated knowledge. . . . freshman-level understandings cannot remain unchallenged through the remaining years of an undergraduate education. ("Opportunities for Renewal," 1988)

☐ Breadth and Depth

An important objective of the baccalaureate is inculcating an appreciation of a variety of ways of approaching reality. This can be done by broad exposure to multiple disciplines as well as by a more intensely focused study of one area of knowledge. In a typical baccalaureate education, breadth is achieved at the lower division in general education and depth at the upper division in a specific discipline.

Robert Zemsky has observed that the "commitment to breadth of study remains the fundamental characteristic of a liberal education" (1989, 16). Breadth is often referred to as general education or liberal studies. It includes the traditional liberal arts and sciences such as literature, philosophy, history, the performing arts, humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. Breadth is not just exposure to content, however. The primary objective of a general education curriculum is to enrich the epistemological tools of students, to teach them to think outside the context of their chosen field of study. It is based on the belief that the engineer will benefit from a grasp of aesthetics; the historian by studying human psychology.

A distinction should always be made between general education and introductory coursework to a discipline. General education courses are designed to give the non-major an overview of the tools of a discipline. Ideally, the general education curriculum should remain independent of the major area of study, and in many institutions general education courses cannot be used to meet major requirements. Unfortunately, the uncontrolled growth of requirements for the major has accelerated pressures to integrate major requirements into the general education curriculum. Some institutions fence off significant portions of general education requirements and assign them to the domain of specific disciplines or broad cognitive areas.

Why is breadth important? Exposure to the range of modes of apprehending and organizing knowledge is critical to the baccalaureate experience. At its very best, breadth should be crafted to provide students with the skills to integrate and interrelate multiple knowledge domains and multiple modes of inquiry. The cross-fertilization and integration of knowledge are especially critical to the creation of new knowledge. Recipients of the baccalaureate are liberally educated, not narrowly trained. A commitment to breadth is also an implicit recognition of the necessity for a rich and diverse curriculum. The importance of maintaining curricular diversity should not be underestimated: "humankind's ultimate survival depends as much on a diverse pool of thoughts as on a diverse pool of genes" (Cowan, 1996, 8).

In-depth study is generally undertaken in a specific discipline or major at the upper division level. One of the best definitions of depth in the curriculum can be found in the 1985 report, Integrity in the College Curriculum:

> Study in depth...is recognition of the degree of complexity and sophistication with which the various components are interrelated and understood.... A course of study has depth if it in fact offers a complex structure of knowledge. The comprehension of this structure–a decent understanding and control of it–is what we mean by study in depth.... Study in depth requires multiple dimensions; it cannot be reached merely by cumulative exposure to more and more of a specified subject matter. (Association of American Colleges, 1985, 28 and 29)

The literature identifies a variety of indicators of depth: "significant concentrations within majors ... sufficient advanced coursework to ensure real depth ... [and the presence of] sequences of courses that lead students from the introductory level and through an intermediate state before culminating in one or more senior or capstone courses" (Zemsky, 1989, 6). A primary indicator of depth in the major is that "roughly one-third of the tagged courses in the domain had three or more prerequisites" (Zemsky, 1989, 19). Southeast Missouri State University's definition of a major includes the following objectives: "Study in depth provides students with an understanding of the fundamental problems and arguments of a discipline or field of study, as well as their limits. It affords them practice with the tools of the subject, introduces them to its historical and philosophical foundations, and gives them a clear sense of its boundaries and its effectiveness as a means for understanding or serving human society" (Southeast Missouri State University, 1991, 19).

☐ Levels of Learning

Consistent with Bloom's taxonomy, colleges and universities have traditionally differentiated coursework into lower and upper divisions to reflect the intellectual developmental process. The expectation is that one cannot perform well at the upper division levels without the preparatory material and the cognitive skills gained at lower levels. Coursework at the lower division level is designed to provide the student with basic intellectual skills (reading, writing, and oral presentation), foundational coursework in the major, and exposure to the cognitive and epistemological structures of a wide array of academic disciplines. Because upper division coursework expects students to think at a higher level of analysis and in greater complexity, the tools of multiple disciplines and the skills necessary to apply them must be second nature to the student.

Traditionally, lower division coursework had a variety of purposes: exposing the student to a breadth of knowledge across many disciplines, providing prerequisite courses for advanced study in a field, and/or introducing the student to the major. Upper division coursework addressed depth and coherence in the baccalaureate degree. In general, lower division coursework is introductory and requires no prerequisites. Lower division courses "increase the knowledge students have of subjects with which they are already familiar, introduce them to new subjects, and/or establish a foundation for them to study a major subject in depth" (South Dakota Board of Regents). Individual courses often consciously emphasize breadth through the accumulation and comprehension of general knowledge in a variety of disciplines. Course titles often include the term introduction to or otherwise imply that the course is a survey or an overview of a discipline or field of study.

In addition to exposing students to a range of knowledge, lower division courses also begin the process of training the mind.

> The primary function [of lower division courses]...is to begin making independent learners of students.... [Courses are] tightly structured, students receive considerable instructional guidance in the learning

> process...instruction is normally information and emphasizes learning skills; entails the use of text materials or resources provided by the instructor. Intellectual skills emphasized in lower division courses include comprehension, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and application of knowledge, but these competencies are not stressed to the same degree they are in upper division courses. (Southeast Missouri State University, 1991, 12–13, and South Dakota Board of Regents)

Upper division courses build on the knowledge and skills learned at the lower division and are designed to develop students' abilities to undertake advanced levels of learning consistent with Bloom's taxonomy: comprehension, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and application of knowledge. An increased engagement with the discipline at the upper division level is designed to help students develop academic and intellectual sophistication. Upper division coursework should also comprise a significant percentage of degree requirements–between one-third and two-fifths of the degree.

The student's level of intellectual maturity and ability play an increasingly important role in upper division coursework as more of the responsibility for learning falls to the student. There is an assumption that students are more committed to the learning process. The primary function of upper division courses is "to refine students' abilities as independent learners" (Southeast Missouri State University, 1991, and South Dakota Board of Regents).

Definitions of upper division commonly include references to the ability to demonstrate "sophisticated understanding, and creative and imaginative synthesis" (Academic Senate of the California State University, 1997, 6–7), higher levels of abstraction (MHECB, 1986), and the application of theory: "As a department we commonly talk of this level as the 'theory courses.' These courses are fairly specialized to allow more in depth analysis and should cultivate higher order thinking" (Speech Communications Department Position Paper, 1999).

☐ Designing the Major

Policies vary, but generally there is an expectation that a significant portion of work at the upper division level will be undertaken in the major. The student undertakes an initial, systematic introduction to the work of the academic profession. Through immersion in the discipline, higher order thinking skills are further developed as the student is gradually exposed to more sophisticated research and analytical skills and is encouraged to apply those skills to current issues in the field and develop an appreciation for the creation of new knowledge. In general, heavy reading requirements to ensure immersion in the field often characterize upper division courses in the major.

The program curriculum for the major should be designed to integrate lower and upper division coursework, and it should emphasize the development of advanced cognitive skills, including the following elements, to ensure its integrity and coherence:

- A principle or principles of organization, and clarity of design
- A progression of knowledge from introductory to final integrated project
- A core of requirements common to all students
- Limited electives, because "learning is cumulative across courses" and the learning experience is "structured to take time....This recursiveness in the curriculum is the enemy of naïve acceptance" (Challenge, 8–11).

According to Michigan State University faculty, the major should

> teach students the history and tradition of the field, its social and economic implications, and the ethical and moral issues to be confronted; should contribute to common understanding rather than to competing and overly-specialized ends; have a distinctive and legitimate intellectual content of its own; have the capacity to enlarge, rather than to narrow, the vision of the student; relate the values of liberal learning to the discipline or profession; have both requisite complexity and relevance to later life; foster the student's quest for informed judgment and the capacities for both appreciate and criticism; teach students to make interpretive decisions and to recognize the consequences of decisions and actions. ("Opportunities for Renewal")

☐ The Faculty

Quality of instruction, the abilities of individual faculty members, and continuity of learning with a particular group of scholars are also critical elements of program design. This design element is based on the principle that it is the discipline's right to credential the members of its profession. The academic credential guarantees the quality of instruction and assures the mastery of the discipline by the student and, by default, the ability of the individual to pass on the tools of the trade.

A related, but nearly forgotten, element of curriculum coherence is the idea that the credential is a function of the collective wisdom and philosophical bent of a particular group of faculty members at a particular institution. A major is not just the sum of its parts or an accumulation of courses from ten different programs. This element will be increasingly relevant in an era of distance learning at multiple institutions. Who will finally validate the student's knowledge?

Questions and Challenges

- Should the baccalaureate be redesigned? Does it work as currently configured? Why?
- The challenge of defining and describing design quality: What are the mechanisms for defining quality at the programmatic and degree level?
- The challenge of being accountable for quality: How would you measure the outcomes of quality design? If you accept these guidelines, what is their relationship to student success? How do you know?
- How do we maintain faculty control of the curriculum? How do we ensure continuity and coherence in the organization of knowledge?

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Note

Additional copies of this paper and of Part II: "The Challenges" are available from n.schleuning@worldnet.att.net. This paper does not represent official policy of the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

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Measuring Academic Quality in the Department of Defense (DoD)

Leslye McDade-Morrison

Why Is DoD Interested in Academic Quality?

☐ **DoD Education and Training**

The DoD has one of the largest, if not the largest, training system in the world. HON Rudy De Leon, as the former Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, stated in 1997 that the "Military Services and the DoD Agencies…annually spend $14 billion to provide 170,000 student years of education and training in over 20,000 courses in schoolhouse training alone."

What are the schoolhouses that the HON Rudy De Leon referred to?

☐ **Degree-Granting Institutions**

All of the degree-granting institutions are accredited by the appropriate regional accrediting body, as well as by specialized accreditors for engineering and medical programs. The institutions include, to name a few:

- Three service academies (Westpoint, the Air Force Academy, and the Naval Academy)
- A medical school
- Graduate schools of engineering
- An intelligence college
- A language institute
- Four war colleges.

☐ **Military Education/Training Institutions**

The appropriate nationally-recognized or specialized accrediting body accredits some of these institutions.

- 38 Army schools (Infantry, Armor, Air Defense Artillery, etc.)
- 14 Navy/Marine Corps schools (Fleet Training Center, Trident Training Facility, etc.)
- 17 Air Force schools that provide specific military job related training (Squadron Officer School, Air Force JAG School, etc.)

☐ **Civilian Education/Training Institutions**

In addition, there are many institutions that provide job-specific training primarily to civilians, although there are some military students. These institutions provide specific training in:

- ○ Polygraphy
- ○ Intelligence
- ○ Auditing
- ○ Acquisition
- ○ Resource management
- ○ Cryptology
- ○ Imagery and mapping
- ○ Equal opportunity

Some of these institutions are accredited by the appropriate nationally recognized accrediting body.

☐ DRI Findings

"DoD has many educational programs, but their quality is mixed.... faculties are often not challenged, and students are not inspired" (Defense Reform Initiative, 1997). This statement from the Defense Reform Initiative (DRI) is referring to the education programs for civilians, not for military personnel. The military's education, training, and professional development system produces the finest military force in the world. Unfortunately, the civilian opportunities are not as well-defined as those for the military. Some see civilian education and training as less important than military education and training. For this reason, the DRI concluded that the DoD renders second-rate education, training, and professional development to its civilian employees. It is the goal of the DRI to raise the quality of civilian education, training, and professional development to "world-class" standards.

What Is the DoD Doing About Academic Quality?

☐ DoD Chancellor for Education and Professional Development

As a result of the findings from the DRI, the Secretary of Defense created a new organization, the DoD Chancellor for Education and Professional Development, with the mission "...to serve as the principal advocate for the academic quality and cost-effectiveness of DoD civilian education and professional development activities" (DoDD 5124.7, September 27, 1999).

☐ Metrics of Excellence Task Force

The Secretary of Defense said that a regional or nationally recognized accrediting body approved by the Department of Education will accredit all institutions. To that end, we are in the process of assisting institutions to apply for and receive accreditation. Of course, the appropriate regional accrediting body already accredits the degree-granting institutions.

On January 19, 2000, the Chancellor invited the heads of 25 institutions to the inaugural meeting of the Metrics of Excellence Task Force. These individuals became the Steering Group. Each member of the Steering Group appointed two individuals from their staff to participate in two separate working groups, Academic Quality Working Group (AQWG) and the Academic Resources Management Working Group (ARMWG). The AQWG members were the senior academic officers (academic deans or provosts) of the institutions. The ARMWG members were the comptrollers, or resource managers, of the institutions.

Each group met almost monthly and kept in very close touch via email. AQWG began by drafting academic standards in three categories, curricula, faculty/staff and students.

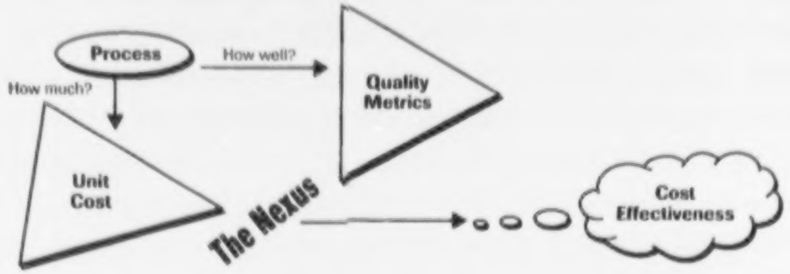
☐ What Were the Results?

AQWG developed:

- ○ DoD academic quality standards for faculty, students, and curricula
- ○ DoD academic quality levels to measure the degree to which an institution has attained the standards (based on "The Competency Standards Project: Another Approach to Accreditation Review," CHEA 2000).

ARMWG developed:

a process to identify and report all costs related to the educational mission of the institution.



The combined outcomes of the two groups (academic quality and unit cost) = institutional cost effectiveness

☐ Why Quality Levels?

Quality levels enable us to look at the institution as a whole rather than as disparate measures of the twelve academic quality standards. For the four standards in the category of curricula, we included all the important aspects of those standards by creating five quality levels. Level 1 describes an institution of low quality, and Level 5 describes an institution of high quality. The levels grow in complexity from Level 1 to Level 5 in two ways. First, there are more elements to satisfy at Level 5 than at Level 1, and second, the elements in Level 5 are more complex. It is possible for an institution to satisfy all the elements of a level plus elements of some higher levels.

To qualify at a particular level, the institution will have to satisfy all elements in a level. If an institution desires to move up a level, it knows exactly what it has to do to achieve the next higher level. Some may decide that it is too expensive to move to a higher level. However, this rating system may also provide the institution a needed requirement to ask for and receive more funding.

☐ Examples of Quality Levels

Examples of some of the quality levels from the curricula standards are in the following three tables. **Bold** type identifies the differences among the levels. Each numbered item within a level is called an element. In this example, Levels 1 and 2 have two elements each, and Levels 3, 4, and 5 have three elements each. In the actual curricula quality levels, there are four elements in Level 1 and twelve elements in Level 5 (see Appendix).

☐ Measurement Scale

The measurement scale between levels is identified by the words "few, if any," "few," "some," "most," and "almost all to all." We defined them as follows:

Few, if any:	none or a very small number, usually in the range of 0<15%
Few:	a small number, usually in the range of 15<30%
Some:	a modest number, usually in the range of 30<70%
Most:	a large number, usually in the range of 70<85%
Almost all to all:	a very large number or approaching the entire population, usually in the range of 85 to 100%

The use of numerical percentages standardizes the data from the institution. Without these percentages, one institution may determine that "few, if any" means 1 percent and another institution may conclude that it means 10 percent. These differences in interpretation would make the data unreliable and eliminate the possibility of institutions benchmarking across categories.

☐ Quality Levels: Element 1

This first element asks the institution to:

- Evaluate how many programs/courses assess student achievement of required learning outcomes (Levels 1-5)
- Determine the amount/type of evidence that the required outcomes were attained (Levels 1-5)
- Include stakeholders in the assessment (Level 5).

◇ ***Chronicle of Higher Education.*** Like the higher education community, the DoD is very interested in measuring the degree to which a student has learned and is able to apply course concepts. James Rogers, the Executive Director of SACS, stated: "The regionals are all becoming less concerned with how colleges are structured and more focused on what kinds of graduates they produce" *(Chronicle of Higher Education,* July 2000).

◇ **Virginia Blue Ribbon Commission.** "In light of the sharp competition for limited public resources from every sector, the citizens of Virginia cannot be expected to continue to support substantial increases in higher education spending unless they are presented with a body of meaningful evidence that demonstrates the high educational quality their support makes possible. To develop such evidence, we must first recognize that excellence in higher education is best evaluated by…not what they know when they enter, but by what they know when they graduate…." *(Final Report on the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education,* February 2000).

Low Quality ⟶ **High Quality**

Academic Quality: Curricula (Element 1)

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
1. Few, if any, programs/courses use assessments to certify student achievement of learning outcomes, and there is little or no evidence that students attain required outcomes.	1. Few programs/courses have assessments in place to certify student achievement of learning outcomes, and there is some evidence that that students attain required outcomes.	1. Some programs/courses use valid and reliable assessments to certify student achievement of learning outcomes, and there is convincing evidence that students attain required outcomes	1. Most programs/courses use valid and reliable assessments to certify student achievement of learning outcomes, and there is convincing evidence that students attain required outcomes.	1. Almost all programs/courses use valid and reliable assessments to certify student achievement of learning outcomes. The assessment involves students, graduates, faculty, and stakeholders, and there is convincing evidence those students attain required outcomes.

☐ Quality Levels: Element 2

In DoD, we used the term in appropriate programs/courses because not all institutions have programs or courses that require certifying, licensing, or national examinations. Therefore, an institution that does have this requirement will have to satisfy this element, those that do not have this requirement are exempt from satisfying this element (Levels 1-5).

In addition to monitoring the percentage of students who attain the established target rate for certification, licensing, or exams, a high-quality institution analyzes the sub-scores to identify deficiencies and then incorporate that information in a plan to improve the curriculum (Levels 4 and 5).

Low Quality

Academic Quality: Curricula (Element 2)

High Quality

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
2. In appropriate programs/courses, few if any students achieve established target success rates on certifying, licensing, and national examinations.	2. In appropriate programs/courses, few students achieve established target success rates on certifying, licensing, and national examinations.	2. In appropriate programs/courses, some students achieve established target success rates on certifying, licensing, and national examinations.	2. In appropriate programs/courses, most students achieve established target success rates on certifying, licensing, and national examinations. Sub-scores are analyzed.	2. In appropriate programs/courses, all students achieve established target success rates on certifying, licensing, and national examinations. Sub-scores are analyzed and the results are used to improve the curricula.

☐ Quality Levels: Element 3

In this era of increased emphasis on computer skills and online learning experiences, we felt that it was critically important for institutions to consider developing a plan to manage technology throughout the institution (Levels 3–5).

The highest quality institution will review its technology plan annually to ensure that it still meets the needs of the institution and its student population and continues to look toward the future (Level 5).

Low Quality

Academic Quality: Curricula (Element 3)

High Quality

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
		3. A technology plan exists for maintenance, support, and infrastructure upgrades.	3. A technology plan exists and is reviewed regularly for maintenance, support, technology, and infrastructure upgrades.	3. A technology plan exists and is reviewed annually for maintenance, support, technology, and infrastructure upgrades.

☐ Quality Level Characteristics

- ○ Outcomes-focused
- ○ Holistic view
- ○ Self-scoring and self-reporting
- ○ Not prescriptive
- ○ Flexible use--institutions, programs, traditional course delivery, distance learning
- ○ Uses existing data
- ○ Promotes consistency
- ○ Allows for benchmarking

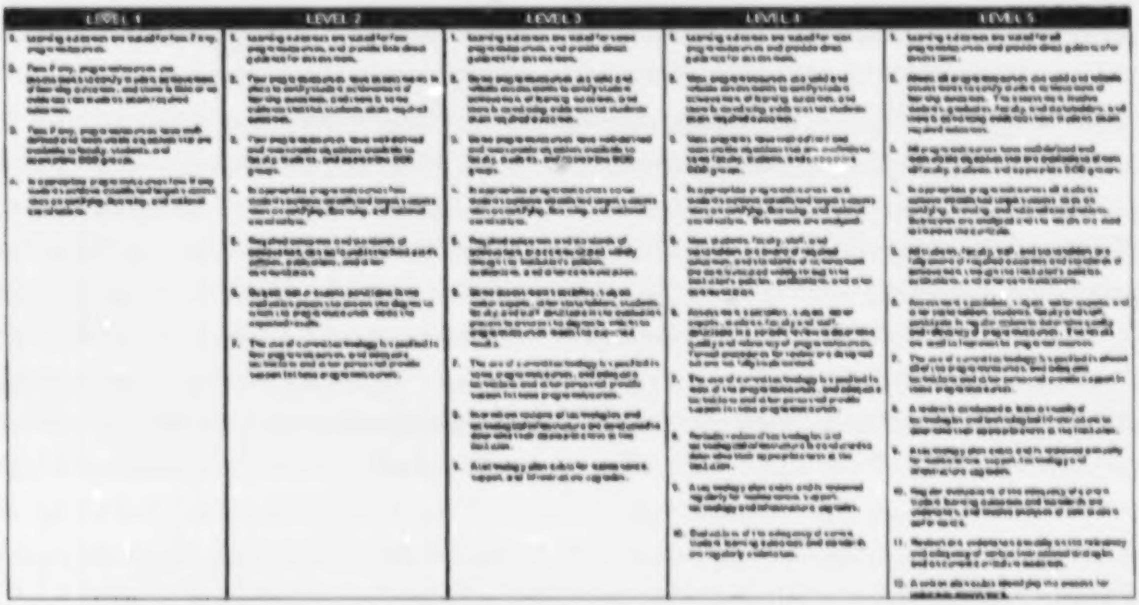
Implementation

The goal is to develop and implement a DoD online reporting system that captures data on academic quality and cost-effectiveness and generates reports to the institutions and other decision makers.

Curricula Levels of Quality: An Illustration

The graphic below visually illustrates the complexity of the quality levels.

Academic Quality: Curricula



LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

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Chapter 5

New Designs in Higher Education
Research Reports

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Tribal College Officials' Views and Perceptions Toward Accreditation

Betsy Putman

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess how the views of tribal college administrators, faculty, and governing board members have changed toward accreditation since 1982. McDonald's 1982 study[1], "An Assessment of Accreditation Practices in Developing Indian Community Colleges Compared with Non-Indian Community Colleges in the Northwest" served as the comparison model. Surveys were administered to the faculty, staff, and board members at the same tribal colleges that participated in the 1982 study. The responses were compared to the 1982 results to see how their views toward accreditation have changed.

Results

1. **How do tribal college administrators rate the importance of various accreditation functions?**

   - Fostering excellence
   - Encouraging institutional improvement
   - Appropriate educational objectives
   - Protecting against encroachments

   The importance of the four accreditation functions was highly rated. The importance of protecting institutions against encroachments was the least highly rated of the four functions. Fewer people answered this item. Judging from the comments, this was due to lack of understanding of the question (respondents were not clear as to what "encroachments" referred). In general, it appeared tribal college officials believed the functions of accreditation are important.

2. **Is specialized accreditation or institutional accreditation more important to tribal colleges?**

   Institutional accreditation was rated as more important than specialized accreditation, although a number of respondents said the two types of accreditation were equally important. This latter response may be dependent upon individual respondent disciplines because some programs such as nursing require specialized accreditation. Still, institutional accreditation was rated most important. A faculty member at a four-year college said, "Without institutional accreditation, it would often be impossible to get specialized accreditation."

3. **What is the impact of accreditation on tribal colleges?**

   - Effects of self-study
   - Accuracy of visiting team's judgments
   - Help/hindrance of visiting team
   - Budget allocation changes
   - Helped desirable change
   - Hindered desirable change

- ○ Prevented undesirable change
- ○ President recommended changes
- ○ Burden of accreditation
- ○ Costs/benefits of accreditation

The answer to this question covered a wide range of issues. The importance of the institutional self-study effects was rated highly by respondents. Some respondents who rated the self-study impact as low commented that their colleges did not follow-up on the self-study findings. The most frequent response for the accuracy of the visiting team's judgments was between "moderate" and "a great deal." The help/hindrance of the last visiting team's judgments and suggestions was rated as "helpful" or "very helpful." Each of the above three items had a large number of "no opinion" responses. This may be because many participants were relatively new to their college so they may not have been there when the last self-study and/or team visit occurred.

Approximately half of the presidents made budget changes and most presidents recommended changes (in areas other than the budget) as a result of the self-study. Most respondents highly rated the extent to which accreditation helps desirable change. A faculty member at a four-year college commented, "Because of the 'newness' of most Tribal Colleges, I believe the accrediting process offers a very important standard for individuals and institutions new to education." The extent to which accreditation hinders desirable change responses differed significantly between the two studies, and is discussed below. Most respondents believed that accreditation does not prevent undesirable change, and the next most frequent response was that accreditation had moderately helped prevent undesirable change. Only presidents responded to the question of whether institutional accreditation had been burdensome. Their responses were fairly evenly distributed among the five response categories ("none" to "a great deal"). Most respondents felt that the benefits of institutional accreditation exceeded the costs.

The responses to questions #1, #2, and #3 illustrate the importance and significant impact of institutional accreditation on tribal colleges. This may be because small and new institutions are more likely to be highly affected by accreditation. In addition, accreditation legitimizes tribal colleges within the higher education community, so accreditation's functions were viewed as important.

The extent to which institutional accreditation hinders desirable change in the respective institution had a significantly different response pattern between 1982 and 2000. See the table below. More people in the 2000 study responded that accreditation hinders desirable change. This may be because now that these institutions are established, they are seeking changes such as adding programs and degrees, and may now experience a different relationship with accrediting agencies than when they were new. Newer institutions are more focused on earning initial accreditation for their existing programs while established institutions may be seeking accreditation agency approval for changes in programs, degrees, etc. and/or accreditation reaffirmation. Therefore, participants in the 2000 study believed accreditation hinders desirable change to a greater extent than participants in the 1982 study did. One administrative officer at a four-year college said, "the self-study and evaluation visit work okay. The between-time hoops to add new programs, degrees, certificates, locations, and distance learning changes are overly restrictive."

The Extent to which Accreditation Hinders Desirable Change

Answered by Presidents, Administrators, and Faculty

		None 0	**1**	**Moderate 2**	**3**	**Total**
Year of study 1982	Count	56	26	16	9	107
	Expected Count	39.2	29.8	22.9	15.1	107.0
2000	Count	40	47	40	28	155
	Expected Count	56.8	43.2	33.1	21.9	155.0
Total	Count	96	73	56	37	262
	Expected Count	96.0	73.0	56.0	37.0	262.0

No opinion responses: n = 44

4. **Does accreditation accurately monitor nontraditional education?**

Respondents felt that accreditation was moderately accurate or accurate in monitoring nontraditional education. Accreditation agencies are sometimes accused of lacking innovation and the ability to monitor properly new trends in higher education. Tribal college officials rated this item lower than the other functions of accreditation, perhaps illustrating that accreditation agencies need to improve in the area of monitoring nontraditional education.

5. **What is the involvement of tribal college governing board members in the accreditation process?**

○ Board received self-study

○ Board discussed accreditation

Most board members received a copy of the self-study and discussed the self-study and/or the visiting team report. Board members are often highly respected community leaders on their reservation and their involvement, or at least awareness of, the accreditation process was valued by college administrators to the point where they were informed and involved in discussions of the process.

6. **How acceptable are alternatives to private, voluntary accreditation?**

○ Continue/discontinue private accreditation

○ Private vs. government accreditation

○ Importance of continuing accreditation if eligibility of funds eliminated

Most respondents believed that private voluntary accreditation should continue. They also believed that private accreditation was more favorable than state or federal regulation. Tribal colleges currently are heavily reliant on the federal government for operational funds, and therefore tribal college officials may prefer to keep the accreditation process in the private sector so as to be less dependent on the federal government. Most respondents believed private accreditation should be continued even if the connection with eligibility of funds was eliminated. Tribal college officials believed the importance of accreditation extends beyond its link to eligibility for federal funds. For example, one person said private accreditation should be continued because it allows students to transfer courses to other institutions.

7. **How acceptable are changes to the accreditation process?**

○ Professional evaluators on visiting teams

○ Non-educators on visiting teams

The desirability of visiting teams composed of full-time professional evaluators or having non-educators serve on visiting teams provided a wide array of responses from very undesirable to very desirable. Some people thought it was favorable to involve full-time professional evaluators and non-educators, while others feared these people would not have the proper educational background to make knowledgeable judgments. Tribal college officials may be more open to changing the composition of the visiting teams because they believed the current visiting team members do not adequately assess their institutions. One suggested change was to include more tribal college or other minority institutional representatives on visiting teams.

8. **Is accreditation meeting the tribal college needs?**

○ Success of accreditation

○ Indian accreditation association

○ If so, replace existing associations

Many of the participants responded "don't know" to the question, "Does accreditation work?" This may illustrate that this broad question was difficult to answer. Of those who chose "yes" or "no," the vast majority of people responded that accreditation works. Respondents were evenly divided on the question of whether an Indian accreditation agency should be formed. As described below, the different responses were received from American Indians as compared with Anglos. Twice as many people believed that an Indian accreditation agency should *not* replace the current accreditation agencies. Comments showed that people believed an Indian accrediting association should *complement* the existing agencies to aid with the cultural understanding of tribal colleges.

Response Patterns by Ethnicity

Further analysis examined different response patterns of American Indians and Anglos. (The mixed and other categories were too small to analyze.) This comparison was for the 2000 study only as demographic data were not available for the 1982 study. Three items produced significant differences.

- More American Indians believed accreditation's function of protecting institutions against encroachments was important. This may be explained by the relationship between tribal councils and tribal colleges. This complex relationship, and how it is affected by accreditation, is the topic of Wabaunsee's (1998) dissertation "Accreditation, Tribal Governments, and the Development of Governing Boards at Tribal Colleges in Montana and Washington." It appears American Indians believed accreditation should protect the colleges from tribal council encroachments. Several respondent comments addressed this issue. A faculty member at a two-year college said, "Tribal politics, if left unchecked without buffers/barriers, can jeopardize our basic educational foundations. Controls need to be in place for external as well as internal interference that can thwart the educational process."

- American Indians rated the importance of institutional self-study effects higher than Anglos. The cause for this difference was difficult to determine.

- Significantly more American Indians than Anglos believed an Indian accreditation agency should be formed. Many respondents commented on this item. Some American Indians believed that accreditation agencies do not properly account for cultural differences on which the colleges are based. Other respondents believed that there should not be an Indian accrediting association, as it might not be regarded as an equal to the existing accrediting agencies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from this study.

- **Tribal colleges should continue to obtain and maintain accreditation with the regional accrediting associations.** As the impact and the importance of institutional accreditation were highly rated by participants, accreditation is viewed as very important to the success of the tribal colleges.

- **Tribal college representatives and regional accrediting association representatives should continue working together to help the latter understand the unique characteristics of tribal colleges.** Many tribal college officials feel that the missions of their colleges are not adequately understood by accreditation officials. Tribal college officials and accreditation agency officials should collaborate so that the mission of each is adequately understood by the other party. This may help the accreditation process proceed more smoothly. In addition, more tribal college representatives should serve as accreditation Consultant-Evaluators. This may help alleviate the issue of visiting team members not fully understanding tribal college missions.

- **Tribal colleges and AIHEC should carefully investigate the benefits and costs of establishing their own accreditation association.** Many tribal college officials, especially American Indians, favor the establishment of an Indian accreditation agency. A feasibility study should be undertaken to see if the benefit to the tribal colleges would outweigh the costs of establishing this organization. This feasibility study should include a mission statement so that the purpose of and need for the organization are clear. This statement should also clarify the Indian accreditation agency's relationship to existing accrediting agencies.

Areas for Further Research

The areas for further research are based on the recommendations and the conclusions above. The first two areas for further research are suggested changes to a future tribal college accreditation study. The next area focuses on high turnover of tribal college faculty and staff. The following areas focus on further research on the impact of accreditation and potential changes in the accreditation process.

- **A future accreditation study should include all tribal colleges.** The 14 tribal colleges in this study were among the more established of the 33 tribal colleges. Do tribal college officials at newer institutions hold the same views toward accreditation as those at established institutions? Seemingly, newer institutions may have different needs regarding accreditation (initial accreditation versus re-accreditation). It would be interesting to see how this affects views toward accreditation. Including all of the colleges could also provide a means of comparison between accredited and non-accredited institutions.

- ◇ **For a future accreditation study, consideration should be given to revamping the study questionnaires so more people are asked each item.** This would present a more accurate picture of how the different groups view accreditation. For example, in the current questionnaire only administrators were asked to rate the importance of continuing or discontinuing private voluntary accreditation. General questions such as this could be asked of all participants to gain a better understanding of how tribal college officials view accreditation.

- ◇ **The causes for high turnover of faculty and staff at tribal colleges should be studied.** Tribal colleges sometimes have a difficult time retaining staff and especially faculty. Discovering the causes of this may lead to higher retention rates. For example, if Anglo employees are leaving due to cultural differences, cultural education programs could be established to address this issue.

- ◇ **Factors that lead tribal colleges to successful initial accreditation should be studied.** Accreditation clearly is very important to tribal college officials. The initial accreditation process can be overwhelming, especially to a minimally staffed, newly founded institution. Identifying factors that lead to successful initial accreditation may help newer colleges successfully navigate this process. This in turn will help these institutions become successful as accreditation enables funding, transfer of credits, etc.

- ◇ **Ways to make accreditation less burdensome to tribal colleges should be analyzed.** Although accreditation may be especially beneficial to new and small institutions, it may also disproportionately burden them as they have fewer resources (monetary, personnel, etc.) with which to carry out the process. Therefore, making accreditation less burdensome to these institutions could decrease the time it takes tribal colleges to achieve initial accreditation.

- ◇ **The specific ways in which accreditation hinders desirable change should be studied.** Significantly more respondents in the 2000 study believed accreditation hinders desirable change than in the 1982 study. Identifying the specific ways in which accreditation hinders desirable change could help the accreditation agencies strengthen their relationship with tribal colleges.

- ◇ **Involving full-time professional evaluators and non-educators in accreditation visiting teams should be explored.** Many respondents were in favor of changing the composition of visiting teams by including professional evaluators and non-educators. Research could determine the positives and negatives of these changes. Further research could also determine why these changes are desired by some tribal college officials.

- ◇ **The reasons why American Indians would like their own accreditation agency should be studied further.** Research could identify what needs are not being met by the current system and/or what is inadequate about the current system. Researching the causes for dissatisfaction with the current system could allow accreditation agencies to make changes to meet tribal college officials' accreditation expectations.

Summary

Despite the majority of American Indians at tribal colleges wishing to establish an Indian accreditation agency, tribal college officials are generally satisfied with accreditation. Most aspects of accreditation were highly rated, with a few exceptions. Respondents in this current study believed that accreditation hindered desirable change more than respondents did in 1982. Respondents for both studies did not rate the accuracy of accreditation in monitoring nontraditional education as highly as other accreditation functions. In addition, respondents for both studies did not believe accreditation prevents undesirable change. Other than the above exceptions, the impact and functions of accreditation were highly rated. Most respondents believed private, voluntary accreditation should continue.

The responses for the three items that varied by ethnicity of the participants (the importance of accreditation in protecting institutions against encroachments, the effects of the self-study, and the desirability of the establishment of an Indian accreditation association) seemed to be primarily attributable to cultural issues. Some tribal college officials, especially American Indians, believed accreditation associations do not sufficiently account for the cultural components of tribal colleges.

Although dramatic changes in accreditation and in the tribal colleges have occurred since 1982, attitudes and perceptions toward accreditation remain largely unchanged. However, the issue of accreditation warrants further exploration as accreditation continues to be a prominent issue in tribal colleges.

Reference

1. The study was completed in 1982, but the questionnaires were administered in Fall 1980.

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Participating Colleges

School	Former Name/ Year Changed	Location	Accrediting Body
Blackfeet CC*		Browning, MT	Northwest
Cankdeska Cikana CC	aka Little Hoop CC	Fort Totten, ND	North Central
Diné College	Navajo CC/1997	Tsaile, AZ	North Central
Dull Knife Memorial C		Lame Deer, MT	Northwest
Fort Berthold CC		New Town, ND	North Central
Little Big Horn C		Crow Agency, MT	Northwest
Nebraska Indian CC		Niobrara, NE	North Central
Northwest Indian C	Lummi CC/1989	Bellingham, WA	Northwest
Oglala Lakota C	Oglala Sioux CC/1983	Kyle, SD	North Central
Salish Kootenai C		Pablo, MT	Northwest
Si Tanka C	Cheyenne River CC/1999	Eagle Butte, SD	North Central
Sinte Gleska University	Sinte Gleska C/1992	Rosebud, SD	North Central
Sitting Bull C	Standing Rock C/1996	Fort Yates, ND	North Central
Turtle Mountain C		Belcourt, ND	North Central

*CC = Community College   C = College

The Utility of Learning Style Data for Learning Outcomes Assessment

David Lopatto
Carol Trosset

The development of assessment practices to measure student learning outcomes on our campus originally took the form of devising tests, portfolios, capstone seminars, and other outcome measures. For most of our faculty, assessing student learning in general and in the academic major absorbs most of the time and energy they are able to devote to the issue. Both of the authors, however, have served as assessment coordinators to the college, and our experience has given us time to reflect on the overall approach to assessment. In what follows, we attempt to show that an exploratory study of student-centered assessment is possible and practical at most institutions. The key features of such a study are (1) an institutional research officer or assessment coordinator who is given time to conduct such studies, (2) easy-to-use instruments that require no special skills for scoring, and (3) the use of archival data that the institution may already possess.

We observe that assessment plans at many institutions lack a procedure for assessing the baseline abilities, learning styles, and academic goals of students before the academic program is encountered. We believe that this lack may have been a result of the North Central Association's emphasizing clear statements "regarding the institution's expectations for student learning," but not clear statements regarding the student's expectations for learning. Collecting information about students as they enter an institution or begin a course of study may complement an assessment program in several ways. First, it provides baseline information against which outcomes assessment may be compared. Second, it provides information about student goal setting (as in the case of intended major or career) that permits faculty to contemplate the congruency between student goals and program goals. Third, it indicates how well the student is "learning how to learn," i.e., bringing appropriate learning strategies to academic tasks. Fourth, it provides evidence of differences in behavior among individuals and groups that may aid planning for an increasingly diverse student body. Discussions of pedagogy and student diversity often make the assumption that different students arrive on campus with different "learning styles," and that these learning styles should be accommodated in the teaching and assessment process.

To engage in an exploration of these issues, we intentionally made use of measures of student behavior that were either already employed by the institution or were easy to use. The college application process yields archives of subject variables such as gender and ethnicity. In addition, the college routinely administers the CIRP freshman survey provided by the Higher Education Research Institute. The CIRP survey, administered about one week before the first-year student begins classes, asks for a wide range of information including intended major, intended career, and self-ratings of student efficacy on a variety of behaviors. Our institution routinely uses the data to benchmark overall performance against similar institutions. For this study, however, we utilized data from those respondents who volunteered identification numbers that permit linking their responses with other information. This other information includes choice of major and overall grade point average. Finally, we used a brief learning style survey to assess self-reported learning style.

Background

Learning styles are patterns of preference or performance in learning. They have been related to student learning and motivation in achievement tasks. One theory of learning styles (Kolb, 1984) suggests that student learning can be assessed along two dimensions, that of concrete experience versus abstract conceptualization, and that of reflective observation versus active experimentation. Students with a distinct learning style may choose disciplines congruent with their style, perform best with pedagogy suited for their style, and benefit by interacting with students who demonstrate a different style. Learning style is often difficult or time-consuming to assess. Romero et al. (1992), however, introduced a brief, practical survey that yields information on student self-descriptions of the two dimensions. Students preferring concrete experience enjoy experiencing events, while students preferring abstract conceptualization enjoy developing concepts or theories. Students preferring reflective observation enjoy analyzing their experience, while students preferring active experimentation enjoy looking for the application of theories in solving problems.

Both student goals and student learning styles influence student performance in higher education (Schunk, 1996). Goals motivate student behavior and may help a student focus on tasks relevant to learning. Most teachers know of students who came to a learning situation with clear academic and career goals. These students are often highly motivated, accept challenging work, and perform well. They are frequently able to compare their current performance to the criterion performance needed to reach their goals. Assessing student academic and career goals on an individual basis, then, may yield information that enhances teaching and learning.

Estimates of self-efficacy on achievement tasks have also been shown to affect behavior. Schunk (1996) defines *self-efficacy* as the judgment of one's capabilities to organize and implement actions necessary to attain designated levels of performance. Self-efficacy is approximately a measure of self-confidence, but research has shown that it is formed by experience (Bandura, 1982). Assessing student self-efficacy estimates, then, may yield information that predicts student learning and student choices such as academic major.

Sources of Data

Our college routinely administers the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) freshman survey, published by the Higher Education Research Institute. This survey is administered to new students during an orientation period a few days prior to the opening of the fall semester. A student's CIRP data may be anonymous, but some students volunteer their Social Security numbers. It is thus possible to compare their responses to other sources of data. Other archival information, including declared major and overall grade point average, were obtained from the registrar's office.

The learning style survey was created and tested by Romero et al. (1992). It consists of 14 questions. Respondents are asked to circle a number (1 to 6) that corresponds to their view of themselves. Pairs of statements, such as "I would describe myself as reflective" versus "I would describe myself as action oriented" are employed to derive scores on the two learning style dimensions, concrete-abstract (ACCE) and reflective-active (AERO). Scores may range from 7 to 42 on each scale. Romero, following Kolb (1984), situates scores by treating the two learning style dimensions as perpendicular axes crossing at the means. This crossing results in four "quadrants" that represent different learning styles. Romero provided data to show that scores in the four resulting quadrants correlated with undergraduate major (see Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the Four Learning Style Quadrants

Quadrant	Description	Survey Scores	Typical Majors
Divergers	Concrete, Reflective	Low ACCE, Low AERO	Languages, Theatre
Assimilators	Abstract, Reflective	High ACCE, Low AERO	Chemistry, Physics
Convergers	Abstract, Active	High ACCE, High AERO	Engineering, Computing
Accommodators	Concrete, Active	Low ACCE, High AERO	Business

Subjects and Analysis

A group of 198 undergraduates taking courses in either introductory statistics or introductory psychology were given the learning style survey by the first author, who was a course instructor. Of these, a search of CIRP archives yielded 70 students who had provided identification on the CIRP. This consisted of 42 women and 28 men.

Learning Style

The group of 198 students provided average scores of 21.5 on the concrete-abstract scale and 24.9 on the reflective-active scale. There were no differences among ethnic groups or course groups on either dimension. There was a small but significant difference between men and women, with men scoring more toward the abstract side (mean = 22.6) of the concrete-abstract dimension than women (mean = 20.5).

Learning style scores did not predict either grades in the course the student was taking or the overall grade point average of the student. Similarly, learning style alone did not predict the academic major the student declared. In order to relate the various information from the CIRP with learning style data, we performed a cluster analysis procedure using SPSS for the 70 students for whom data were available. The analysis yielded five clusters of student profiles. One of these clusters included four students whose greatest common feature was a low grade in their psychology course. The low grade variable was not an input but an outcome of the cluster analysis. The other four clusters bore some resemblance to the four quadrants of learning style, including average learning style scores that placed the four clusters within the four quadrants (see Table 2).

Table 2. Results of a Cluster Analysis in which Similar Student Profiles are Clustered Together On CIRP and Learning Style Data

Cluster	CIRP and Grade Characteristics	Learning Style Means	Overall GPA
1 (n = 21)	Low efficacy in competitiveness and leadership.	(19,19) Divergers	3.09
2 (n = 10)	High efficacy in academic skills. All intend to go on to advanced degrees.	(27,23) Assimilators	3.47
3 (n = 12)	High efficacy in math skills and in competitiveness.	(30,31) Convergers	3.19
4 (n = 20)	High efficacy in verbal skills. No science majors.	(19,26) Accommodators	3.29
5 (n = 4)	High efficacy in social skills. Weak academically.	(14,33) Accommodators	2.40

Closing the Feedback Loop

We intend to present our findings at faculty forums at our institution. In particular, we plan to present the findings to the faculty who are preparing for next fall's freshman seminars. These faculty teach groups of approximately 12 new students in seminars that emphasize writing and discussion skills. Each faculty member becomes the academic adviser to the students he or she teaches. We believe that faculty who are familiar with the learning style quadrants may be able to diagnose reasons for student academic failure, both in these seminars and in other courses the students are taking. That is, advisers may be able to suggest that students adopt a style of learning that may be congruent with the pedagogy of the course. Measuring learning style reliably may be the first step to teaching optimal styles for learning.

Conclusion

Our exploration of learning style and other personal variables suggests that these "soft" assessment variables may be useful in understanding the student's perspective in the learning process. Estimates of self-efficacy and learning style may make modest but significant contributions to learning outcomes.

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Assessment of Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines

Catherine A. Palomba
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During the past fifteen years, pressures for assessment of student competence have come from several groups, including students and their parents, employers of graduates, state legislators, and the general public. In addition to these stakeholders, regional and disciplinary accreditors have played particularly important and mutually reinforcing roles in encouraging assessment of student learning. Regional accreditors expect their member institutions to demonstrate that graduates are competent within their fields of study, thereby fostering assessment within disciplines. Similarly, the assessment expertise faculty develop as they respond to disciplinary accreditors helps them meet the assessment requirements of regional accreditors.

We have observed that faculty in accredited fields have several advantages in conducting assessment. In addition to the impetus for assessment provided by disciplinary accrediting bodies, other factors include close faculty ties with alumni and employers, coherent programs of study, and opportunities to provide active learning experiences for students. Because we believe that faculty in accredited fields are assessment pioneers who have valuable experiences to share with their colleagues in other fields, we initiated a study of assessment in the disciplines of teacher education, pharmacy, nursing, social work, business, computer science, engineering, and the visual arts. Based on recommendations from knowledgeable individuals in the central offices of the relevant disciplinary accrediting bodies, we identified campus leaders to share the story of assessment in their disciplines. We asked each contributor to describe the current practice of assessment in that field on various campuses, to pay close attention to the role that specialized accreditors play in fostering assessment of student competence in the discipline, and to identify assessment lessons for faculty in other fields. The contributions from our authors demonstrate that, although each discipline's assessment story is clearly unique, enough similarities exist to allow for meaningful and productive sharing of assessment experiences (Palomba and Banta, in press).

The Practice of Assessment in Selected Accredited Disciplines

On many campuses, faculty in applied fields have made significant progress in carrying out assessment of student achievement in the major. They have reached consensus about various competences expected of students in their programs, developed and implemented a rich variety of assessment techniques, involved faculty and other stakeholders, and used assessment results to improve student learning.

In each of the accredited disciplines examined for this study, faculty assess general education skills as well as specialized skills. Although the specifics differ within and across disciplines, faculty expect their graduates to develop the competences required by employers, including the abilities to think critically and solve problems. Students are also expected to develop appropriate values and attitudes. For example, both business graduates from Winthrop University and computer science graduates from Brigham Young University are expected to be competent in ethical reasoning, communication, and lifelong learning skills. In several cases, faculty have articulated expectations for competence that allow their students to build their skills over time. Teacher education faculty at Asbury College have created a Continuous Improvement Model to assess their students, and at King's College the curriculum is structured around competence growth plans.

In the disciplines we examined, faculty are most likely to use locally developed approaches. Often they draw on assessment instruments and methods that are already in place, including classroom assignments from capstone or other courses. Across the disciplines, faculty typically use multiple measures, including both quantitative and qualitative techniques. For example, on some campuses, nursing faculty use narratives to evaluate the ability of students to identify problems. As one might expect, faculty in applied fields use performance assessment extensively.

Similar to their colleagues elsewhere, faculty in the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning at the University of Cincinnati use juried critiques and oral defense of theses to evaluate cognitive skills. Engineering students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) complete major design projects that are presented both orally and in writing. Although less comfortable assessing attitudes and values, faculty in applied fields attempt to do so. For example, pharmacy faculty on various campuses use attitude surveys, preceptor evaluations, and the California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory for this purpose.

Assessment leaders in the accredited disciplines featured in this study use various methods to help involve faculty in assessment. These include developmental workshops, faculty retreats, and attendance at assessment conferences. When faculty from the Division of Pharmacy Practice at the St. Louis College of Pharmacy were developing assessment criteria and rubrics in seven ability areas, each individual served on one of seven ability subcommittees. At the time they were preparing for a reaccreditation visit from their disciplinary accreditor, faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University attended biweekly meetings and participated in content teaching groups.

Many faculty in applied disciplines have established close collaboration with external stakeholders, including alumni, employers, internship supervisors, and field instructors. For example, human resource management faculty at Ohio University have benefited greatly from the expertise provided by their advisory board of practitioners.

Faculty on several campuses have organized their assessment processes in meaningful ways that facilitate the use of assessment results. Business faculty at Ball State University rely on undergraduate and graduate assessment committees to foster assessment activities. At Columbia College, the assessment program director for social work prepares an annual report that is the basis for recommendations by the social work advisory committee. On some campuses, the use of assessment information has led to significant change. For example, the College of Engineering at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University extended a writing program that was initially available in only one department to all departments.

The Effects of Specialized Accreditation on Assessment in Selected Disciplines

Since 1988 the U.S. Department of Education has required accrediting bodies to collect information about student learning as part of the accreditation process. Both the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) expect accrediting organizations to emphasize assessment of student learning in accreditation reviews. In several disciplines including pharmacy, nursing, computer science, and teacher education, significant changes in expectations for graduates have also been a factor in encouraging specialized accreditors to expect assessment. To facilitate assessment, specialized accreditors provide appropriate resources, articulate expected competences for graduates, encourage the use of performance assessment, and expect their members to use assessment results to improve student learning.

Specialized accreditors and professional associations use web sites, written materials, and conference sessions to support the assessment efforts of their members. AACSB–The International Association for Management Education has held three conferences devoted exclusively to assessment. In the early 1990s the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) began using sessions at its annual conference to encourage members to consider how assessment might be applied to art and design programs. The Commission on Accreditation (COA) of the Council of Social Work has introduced a faculty development program to assist faculty in creating assessment plans.

Specialized accreditors typically expect their members to address both general education and discipline-specific skills in their assessment programs. The Council on Accreditation for social work expects baccalaureate and masters' graduates to understand the positive value of diversity and to think critically. The Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) requires engineering faculty to assess the ability of graduates to function on multidisciplinary teams and to understand ethical responsibility. Rather than developing exact statements that its members must adopt, in most cases an accrediting body expects its members to develop campus-specific statements to address the outcomes the accreditor has endorsed.

Several specialized accreditors have encouraged the use of performance assessment. In 1990 the Council of Arts Accrediting Associations urged its members to focus assessment efforts on the ability of students to "integrate knowledge and skills comprehensively on professional work" (p. 6). Accreditors in pharmacy and teacher education have also encouraged performance assessment.

Specialized accreditors have recognized the value of including stakeholders in the assessment process. The social work COA encourages its members to collect evidence from employers of graduates, field instructors, and clients. Typically, ABET visiting teams include a number of individuals from industry as well as academe.

Specialized accreditors expect their members to use assessment results to improve student learning. The Commission for Collegiate Nursing Education, a new accrediting body established in 1997, encourages assessment as a "conversation" about the knowledge and skills nurses will need in the future. In some disciplines, the current emphasis on institutional mission and goals has provided more flexibility in the way faculty prepare for accreditation. For example, AACSB no longer requires its members to submit specific templates or charts, although specific types of information must be provided.

Lessons and Challenges Across Accredited Disciplines

The experiences of faculty in accredited disciplines illustrate several lessons that are common to successful assessment, including the need for patience, flexibility, faculty involvement, administrative leadership, and communication. One of the most important lessons demonstrated by this study is the need for assessment to support the learning process that has been adopted in the discipline. In both teacher education and pharmacy, assessment innovations have been part of a larger set of changes that affect the way students are taught and evaluated. Educational leaders in pharmacy have recommended the adoption of an ability-based curriculum in order to support a shift in mission toward providing patient care rather than products. To implement this curriculum, faculty are developing assessment methods that provide feedback to students so they can monitor their own progress.

In several disciplines, faculty have struggled to create successful assessment programs. Faculty in both nursing and engineering have sometimes found the task to be difficult. Those who have been successful have needed to be flexible in their approaches and have often modified their assessment techniques. For example, business faculty at SIUE added a letter grade to their senior seminar in order to increase student motivation to do well in the course. Successful assessment programs are those that involve faculty in a variety of roles and seek approval of the faculty as a whole at several points in the assessment process. For example, at Seton Hall the work of small groups of business faculty were eventually presented to the entire faculty for endorsement.

On several campuses, assessment has changed the faculty culture. But this does not happen quickly. Nursing faculty at Indiana University spent several years developing and revising their curriculum and assessment processes. Faculty culture in the College of Business at Northern Arizona University began to change only when faculty began to think of the business core as a joint venture.

Specialized accreditors need to do their part to ensure that assessment is successful. Visiting teams must be well-prepared to evaluate assessment activities on college campuses. David Dill points out that "good reviewers are gems," but reviewers can also be unprepared or unrealistic (1998, p. 21). To be of most value, specialized accreditors must concentrate their efforts on helping faculty improve their programs.

In spring 2001, the results of this study will appear in a Stylus publication entitled *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines: Pioneering Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education.* In addition to thirteen contributing authors, the leaders of the disciplinary accreditation organizations featured in the study assisted us in creating this volume. They expressed support for our project, helped us identify assessment experts in the disciplines, and provided assessment-related materials. The web sites of CHEA, ASPA, and several disciplinary accreditors also provided valuable information.

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Toward Consistency of Assessment in Writing Seminars

Dennis Temple
Louise Love

Roosevelt University is private institution serving some 7000 students at two campuses, one in downtown Chicago and the other in Schaumburg, a northwest suburb. The only universal requirement for undergraduates is two semesters of composition. Otherwise, each of the five colleges in the university controls its own general education system.

The College of Arts and Sciences, the largest and most diverse of the five colleges, has a three-tier general education program. Students who enter the college with freshman standing are required to take a two-semester great books course. Sometime during their sophomore or junior year students must take a one-semester signature course on an aspect of urban-suburban life. Finally, students who are near graduation must take a senior seminar, the college's capstone course. Signature courses and senior seminars are developed by faculty around their own interests under the supervision of the General Education Committee. Students can choose a signature course or senior seminar from an array of different offerings, around five to seven at each campus.

The senior seminar was created as a course that would serve the needs of students who were about to leave the university. The faculty committee that designed the course decided to require that senior seminars be interdisciplinary. The point of this was to give students a more realistic model for problem solving, since real problems seldom if ever fall neatly into disciplinary boundaries. The seminar was also designed to give students a final opportunity to sharpen research and writing skills. All senior seminars, regardless of content, require students to do a major research paper of fifteen to twenty pages.

Assessment Comes to Roosevelt

In the fall of 1995, in preparation for its NCA site visit, Roosevelt was required to submit a comprehensive assessment plan. The plan that we submitted called for the hiring of four Assessment Coordinators and the establishment of a University-wide Assessment Committee. The committee was formally constituted in the fall of 1996, after the site visit. One of the authors of this paper was named co-chair of the Assessment Committee and Coordinator for General Education Assessment.

In retrospect, it is fair to say that we were naive about the whole process of assessment. Some of us thought that assessment would be a relatively straightforward process of implementing our assessment plan. Many more thought that assessment would reveal little that we didn't already know. After all, hadn't we been assessing (grading) students for years? How could this be different?

Assessing the Research Paper

Early in the spring of 1997 we decided to undertake an assessment of the senior seminar course. There were two reasons for making this suggestion. First, the senior seminar is the capstone in the general education curriculum of the College of Arts and Sciences. Second, the senior seminar guidelines mandated a research paper of substantial length. Thus, an assessment of outcomes focused on the research paper seemed both highly feasible and likely to yield significant information about how well instructors understood and were enforcing the requirement and how well students were doing in attempting to meet it. The Assessment Committee and the General Education Committee both thought this project worthwhile and agreed to authorize and cooperate with it.

The main aim of the project, as first conceived, was to see how consistently research papers were graded across different sections of the course. The method chosen was to take a sample of unmarked papers and have these regraded by members of the General Education Committee. Grades and regrades would then be compared.

First Pilot Study: Spring 1997

In the spring of 1997 thirteen sections of the senior seminar were offered. Each instructor was asked to submit an unmarked copy of every research paper from his or her section and to fill out and send in a form rating each of these papers and reporting the paper grade. The ratings form asked the instructor to check a box from one to five in the following categories: conceptual understanding, reasoning skills, research and bibliography, organization of the paper, and writing mechanics. A rubric defining the lowest (one) and highest (five) ratings in each category accompanied the form. Papers and ratings forms were received from eight sections (a total of 108 papers).

In May 1997 the General Education Committee met and read a stratified random sample of these papers. The sample was constructed by sorting the papers into four piles by grade (A, B, C, and D-F); two piles were selected at random for each section and one paper was randomly selected from each of these two, for a total of sixteen. Selected papers were read, rated, and graded by a member of the committee. These ratings and grades were then compared with those given by the original instructor.

Grades and regrades in this first study were remarkably consistent. Of the sixteen papers in sample, only two had grades and regrades that differed by two levels (e.g., A to C or B to D). (This pattern was not borne out in later studies.) Another finding, which was both surprising and disturbing, was that either the instructor or the regrader judged three of the papers in the sample (19 percent) very likely to have been plagiarized.

Second Pilot Study: Fall 1997

This was to have been a full-scale assessment, but papers and forms were received from only four of the eight sections. The committee decided to go ahead with this as a second pilot study and to take steps to ensure greater compliance in the future.

The ratings form and rubric were the same as in the previous study. However, in this case we sampled four papers from each section, one taken from each of the four grade categories: A, B, C, and D-F. Here for the first time we found some real differences in grading and rating of papers. Regraders assigned papers the same letter grade—ignoring pluses and minuses—in only five of the sixteen cases (29 percent). In two cases (12 percent) there was a difference of two grade levels.

Since the first pilot study had not turned up serious discrepancies in grading, we thought that the discrepancies that turned up here might be an anomaly, due in part to the fact that the original instructors were basing the paper grade not only on overall student performance (reflected in the ratings grid) but also on process factors. A grade, for example, might be lower because the student did not comply with some specific direction of the instructor or because the student turned the paper in late; it could be higher because the instructor saw significant improvement or perceived some special virtue in the way the topic was treated. Regraders, on the other hand, would be unaware of the process and could base their judgment of the paper only on what they actually saw—the paper itself taken out of context.

In order to control for these process issues, we decided to redesign the ratings form and rubric. On the new form, instructors were asked to rate the paper as before, but to give it two grades: one that reflected performance only and another that would take into account process issues, if any. This new ratings form was used in both of the subsequent assessments.

First Full Assessment: Spring 1998

The committee received papers and forms from five of six sections. As before, we took a stratified sample by grade category, four papers from each section. The results were not what was expected, and on the whole they were not very encouraging. For one thing, two of the twenty papers sampled (10 percent) were thought to have been plagiarized. One was so identified by the instructor, another by the regrader.

Moreover, contrary to what we had expected, the consistency between the pure performance grade and the regrade showed no improvement over the previous study. The same letter grade–again, ignoring pluses and minuses–was assigned by both the instructor and the regrader in only five cases (25 percent of the sample). In other words, the regrader assigned the paper a different letter grade 75 percent of the time. Worse yet, there was a difference of two or more grade levels in nine cases or 45 percent of the sample. Two of these differences were due to the belief that the paper had been plagiarized, but this still left seven serious discrepancies (35 percent of the sample), and in all seven of these cases the higher grade had been assigned by the original instructor.

A close look at these seven cases suggested that some instructors tended to be biased in favor of the students, particularly where the students in question strongly supported the "right" side of a controversial issue. But more important was the fact that instructors were accepting as research papers student compositions that were essentially expository or opinion pieces. Committee members, by contrast, tended to give such efforts low grades.

Second Full Assessment: Fall 1998

In the fall of 1998 papers and ratings forms were received from all eleven sections of the senior seminar. However, the sample selected for examination and regrading was constructed somewhat differently this time. The committee was now very concerned about discrepancies in grading. Since previous assessments had turned up major discrepancies almost exclusively in papers whose original grade was A, B, or C, they decided to exclude papers that had been given a D or an F by the original instructor. Because of the relatively large number of sections in this study, the committee decided to sample three papers from sections of twenty or more students, and two papers from sections with fewer than twenty.

Overall results were similar to those of the previous assessment. Of a total of twenty-six papers sampled, discrepancies of two grade levels or more were found in eight cases, representing 31percent of the sample. As before, where there was a major difference in grade, the regrades were the lower of the two.

The committee looked closely at each of these cases. On the basis of this analysis, the committee reached two conclusions. The first is that instructors simply have different ideas about what constitutes a research paper. In most cases a committee member assigned a lower grade because the paper was seen as expository, a more or less competent summary of a body of facts, and thus judged to be a report and not a research paper. Committee members were unwilling to accept such papers as genuine research papers because the papers in question had no thesis, no argument, and no real conclusion. Some of the instructors, by contrast, were very willing to accept these same papers and in fact gave them good grades, particularly when the exposition was well-written and clear.

In addition, plagiarism turned up once again. Although in this study the sample was constructed in a way that would exclude papers judged plagiarized by the original instructor (since instructors would give such papers a failing grade), nevertheless one paper in the sample was identified by the regrader as probably plagiarized. The original instructor had not suspected plagiarism; the paper had been given a grade of A.

Conclusions of the Project

We began this our first assessment study with the expectation that instructors would have more or less uniform standards and that grading across sections would be reasonably consistent. This belief had long been reinforced in discussions of grading with each other. Instead, we found an overwhelming lack of consistency in grading. Some of this could be traced back to normal and acceptable differences in weighting: for example, one instructor might consider reasoning skills as very important in determining the overall worth of a paper, while another might take writing mechanics or research and bibliography as paramount. But the vast majority of disparities in grading could not be so explained. Instead, they revealed some serious issues.

- ◇ **Different standards.** Most committee members believed that a research paper would have to be argumentative. However, we found that while some instructors demanded an argumentative paper, others were quite willing to accept competent expository papers as meeting the standard.
- ◇ **Content grading.** Some senior seminars were organized around political and moral issues, such as the politics of AIDS, the history of the Holocaust, and the treatment of Native Americans. Students whose papers showed a depth of understanding and sympathy for these issues were sometimes forgiven for less-than-adequate performance in writing.

- **Plagiarism.** All of our studies turned up papers that had clear marks of wholesale plagiarism (all or nearly all of such papers had been copied or purchased). In many cases the instructor had not seen the signs of plagiarism and had given the paper a high mark (A or B) without further investigation.

Actions Taken

During the last year, the General Education Committee has spent most of its time working on a complete revamping of our composition program. We have now finished and a reconsideration of the senior seminar is on the agenda this semester. Nevertheless, we have taken several actions to deal with issues of grading.

- **Research paper requirement.** After several sessions debating the definition of a research paper, a consensus finally emerged that a well-written expository paper could serve the needs of students in this course, and would be more appropriate for some topics. The requirement that the paper be argumentative was dropped; the guideline now says only that "The paper should involve original research."

- **Different weighting and content grading.** This is a far more difficult issue. That instructors should have somewhat different values is normal; any coercion in this area would rightly be seen as a violation of academic freedom. However, there is no reason why we cannot help instructors to become more conscious of their own grading practices. We sponsored a workshop on grading last year, and we are considering requiring annual or semi-annual workshops for all general education faculty. Our hope is that these workshops will foster a community of instructors who agree on at least some of the elements that should go into the evaluation of student papers.

- **Plagiarism.** One of the clearest and most disturbing results of this assessment project was that there is a chronic low level problem of plagiarism, and that many instructors do not know how to detect plagiarism or what to do about it. We have had two faculty workshops on plagiarism to inform people about it. But we think that prevention is far better than detection and punishment. One of the best forms of prevention is to work closely with students while they are in the process of doing the paper. Students who are assured that they will receive plenty of help are less likely to plagiarize; moreover, asking students to turn in topics, bibliography, and parts of the written paper early in the semester simply makes it harder for them to engage in wholesale plagiarism. The senior seminar guidelines now require instructors to grade early drafts of the papers. The revised guidelines also require that there be at least one in-class writing assignment so that instructors will be aware of each student's own writing abilities and vocabulary level. This, too, helps prevent plagiarism.

It now seems obvious that we need to have much more ongoing training and supervision of instructors who teach the senior seminar and other general education courses. We are considering different ways of making this happen.

Contrary to our initial assumption that assessment was exclusively about students and their work, we learned through these assessments of our practices as a faculty that there was a real need to improve our own performance as assessors of others. We believe that the process has resulted in benefits to students as well as to faculty and that our practice as professionals has been significantly enhanced.

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General Education, Assessment, and Accreditation: Do Faculty Perceive Improvement?

Mark E. Nutter

Background

General education has long been a topic of controversy at colleges and universities. Many, both inside and outside of higher education, have called for its improvement, but few have agreed that significant improvement has ever been achieved. As Cross wrote, "It is fairly easy to trace the fortunes and misfortunes of general education over the decades; it is far more difficult to evaluate its impact on education and society" (1982, p. 15). In the last ten years, accreditation agencies such as the North Central Association have adopted specific guidelines by which the centrality of general education programs may be evaluated. As part of this new emphasis, much of the accreditation process has shifted from a focus on the inputs of higher education to the outcomes of students' learning in general education as well as the major area of study.

Since the faculty deliver instruction, it is unlikely that even accreditation agencies can have much effect on changing the educational process without their support. However, much research into general education has focused on administrators or on students; few studies have looked at how faculty have been reacting to guidelines for general education that are tied to accreditation.

Purpose of the Study

This study was developed to provide information about community college faculty members' attitudes toward the guidelines for general education established by the North Central Association's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Specifically, the study attempted to determine whether a relationship existed between the Commission's guidelines as outlined in the statement on "Documenting the Centrality of General Education" (NCA, 1997, p. 24) and community college faculty members' perception of satisfaction with the general education program at their colleges. The study also attempted to determine whether a relationship existed between those guidelines and community college faculty members' perception of change in their general education program during the period from 1994 to 1999.

Methodology

The population studied was the approximately 21,300 full-time faculty members at the community colleges accredited by the North Central Association. The source of the population was a collection of college catalogs from 260 (92 percent) of these institutions. The sample of 369 faculty was systematically selected from these catalogs, resulting in a sample that was stratified by college size.,

A questionnaire consisting of three sections: 10 demographic items, 34 Likert-type items, and 3 open-ended questions was developed by the researcher. The demographic items served to categorize the respondents in ways that might have a relationship to attitudes toward general education. The Likert items were organized in subscales that measured faculty attitudes toward (1) the individual aspects of the NCA guidelines for general education programs; (2) the combined aspects of the NCA guidelines for general education; (3) students' preparation for college-level general education study; (4) perception of change in their college's general education program over the past five years; and (5) satisfaction with the general education program. The open-ended questions asked respondents to add additional information about the general education programs at their colleges. Two hundred and fifty-five faculty members (69 percent of the sample) responded to the survey.

The SPSS statistical package (Base 9.0) was used to analyze the data through the application of non-parametric statistics. The level of significance for all hypotheses tested was .05. Spearman's Rho was used to test correlation hypotheses. The Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA test were used to test the other hypotheses. A principal components analysis was also done to examine how the various subscales interacted.

Documenting the Centrality of General Education

It is essential that an institution of higher education seeking initial or continued affiliation with the Commission document and make public the centrality of general education to its educational endeavors. An evaluation team considers whether the institution's

- mission and purposes statements articulate the centrality of general education;
- statements of educational philosophy demonstrate how general education goals are integrated into core, major, and elective courses within the major;
- institution-wide general education learning objectives are clearly articulated and publicized;
- assessment of academic achievement includes the general education component of the program and is linked with expected learning outcomes;
- faculty teaching general education courses hold graduate degrees that include substantial study (typically a minimum of 18 semester hours at the graduate level) appropriate to the academic field in which they are teaching;
- faculty have ownership and control over the general education curriculum through active participation in appropriate governance structures; and
- faculty systematically and comprehensively review the general education curriculum.

(NCA, 1997)

Research Questions

Seven of the research questions focused on relationships between individual elements of the NCA's guidelines for general education and (1) the faculty members' current levels of satisfaction with their colleges' general education programs, and (2) the faculty members' perceptions of change in their colleges' general education program over the last five years. Positive correlations for satisfaction with the general education program were found on the basis of (1) perception of general education as a part of the college mission, (2) perception of integration of general education throughout the curriculum of the college, (3) perception of faculty ownership of general education, (4) perception of faculty participation in general education, (5) perception of administrative support for general education, (6) perception of faculty involvement in evaluation of the general education program, and (7) perception of coherence of the general education program. Additionally, positive correlations were found for the same seven variables with respect to perception of positive change in the general education program over the preceding five years. All correlations were significant at the .05 level, and the null hypothesis was rejected in each case.

Two research questions focused on the relationship between faculty satisfaction with their college's general education programs and (1) the existence of clearly defined goals or objectives of general education, as well as (2) the existence of an individual or committee to coordinate the general education program. Both tests were significant at the .05 level, and the null hypotheses were rejected. It appeared that the presence of each of these factors was related to faculty satisfaction with their general education programs.

Research questions focusing on differences in faculty members' level of satisfaction with their colleges' general education program based on various levels of four demographic variables: age, length of employment, teaching area, and college size resulted in no relationships that were significant at the .05 level. The null hypothesis failed to be rejected in each case.

Other research questions looked at (1) faculty members' levels of satisfaction with their colleges' general education program and (2) faculty members' perception of change in their colleges' general education program in the last five years in relationship to the time elapsed since their college's last NCA comprehensive evaluation for accreditation. Neither test was significant at the .05 level, and the null hypotheses failed to be rejected. However, similar research questions focusing on satisfaction and change in relationship to the time elapsed since the last general education program review were significant at the .05 level. It appeared that colleges reporting having reviewed their general education programs within the last two years had the highest level of satisfaction and the highest level of perceived change. The two-year period was also the category with by far the highest number of responses, which may have also affected these results.

Another research question examined faculty members' levels of satisfaction with their colleges' general education programs in relationship to approaches to assessment of general education. The test was significant at the .05 level, and the null hypothesis was rejected. It appeared that those respondents reporting that their colleges were using a locally developed general education test, a combination of assessment methods, or course-based methods were generally more satisfied with their general education programs than were those who reported using a commercially developed test or no formal procedure for assessment. A similar comparison found no significant connection between satisfaction with the general education program and the method used to deliver general education.

Additional Findings

☐ NCA Guidelines Seem to Be Effective

While it is true that correlation should not be interpreted as causation, the strength and the number of the positive correlations found between NCA guidelines for general education programs and the measures of satisfaction and perceived positive change in general education programs appear to be meaningful. One possible conclusion that can be reached from these findings is that the NCA guidelines are working, at least in terms of faculty satisfaction with and perceived improvement in general education programs. Three points are of particular importance.

- Each of the elements of the NCA guidelines for general education was positively and significantly correlated with both satisfaction with the general education program and perceived positive improvement in the general education program.
- This finding was further supported by a strong positive correlation of .621 (significant at the .01 level) between the combined elements of the NCA guidelines and faculty's perceptions of satisfaction with their general education programs.
- The combination of NCA guidelines had a stronger correlation with perceived improvement in the college's general education program (.598, significant at the .01 level) than did any single element of the guidelines.

These findings support NCA's assumptions about the indicators of a strong general education program, and also indicate that improvement is more strongly associated with the combination of those factors than with any single factor.

☐ General Education Goals Seem to Be a Significant Factor

The community colleges accredited by the NCA have made significant progress in establishing goals or objectives for general education. Nearly 92 percent of faculty responding to the survey indicated that their colleges had established such goals.

The importance of general education goals was also reinforced through responses to the open-ended survey questions. The existence of clear goals or objectives was cited by 20 respondents as a strength of their colleges' general education program. Likewise, lack of clear mission, goals, or expected outcomes was frequently cited as a weakness.

☐ Leadership or Coordination for General Education Is Related to Satisfaction and Coherence

The community colleges accredited by the NCA have made considerable progress in establishing leadership for their general education programs. More than 77 percent of the faculty members responding to the questionnaire indicated that their institutions had an individual or committee to coordinate the general education program. This would seem to indicate that a change has taken place since Gaff's (1993) observation that general education generally lacks leadership. The existence of an individual or committee to coordinate general education was found to be positively related to both satisfaction with the general education program and coherence in the general education program. These findings support the observations of Hinson and Stillion (1996), who indicated that the appointment of a committee and/or director for general education was related to improvement in general education programs. It is also interesting to note that many of the respondents' comments about general education program weaknesses were specifically problems requiring coordination and leadership to resolve: lack of consistency, failure to use data to improve general education, and lack of integration of general education throughout the curriculum.

☐ Diversity in Approach

The NCA Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (1997, p. 24) has stated that approach to general education is of secondary importance to the creation of a coherent program. It is evident that considerable diversity in approaches to general education does exist at community colleges accredited by the NCA. In addition to five common approaches listed on the survey, 58 respondents identified a total of 18 combinations of those approaches being used at one or more colleges. In fact, a combination of approaches was the most common method of delivery and was reported by 23.1 percent of the respondents. The combination approach was followed closely by distribution requirements with a wide choice of courses (21.2 percent).

At the same time, there was no evidence that any particular approach was more related to satisfaction than any other. This would seem to indicate that faculty would do well to find an approach that fits the needs of their institution and not try to find a "best" method.

☐ Diversity in Assessment

While general education has existed since the early part of this century, the concept of formal assessment of general education is relatively new and still under development on many campuses. In fact, nearly half (44.3 percent) of the respondents reported that their colleges were relying solely on course-based assessment to judge the effectiveness of general education programs. Beyond that, there was considerable diversity in approaches to assessment of general education. In addition to five common assessment methods listed on the survey, 54 respondents identified a total of 13 combinations of those approaches being used at one or more colleges. However, it was evident from respondents' comments that assessment was not institutionalized at many colleges. Respondents comments included: "We're still working on assessment procedures." "Assessment could be improved." "No one is sure what the term general education means nor does anyone know how to assess it." "Some outcomes are very hard to assess." "Each faculty is assessing individually at this time." "We haven't done much other than talk."

It was also evident that faculty were less pleased with commercially produced tests than they were with a combination of assessment methods, a locally developed test, course-based assessment, or "other assessment methods." In fact, the use of a commercially produced test even ranked below having no procedure at all for assessing general education skills. Additionally, those faculty who were likely to give high marks to their institutions in the area of completing the feedback loop for general education assessment were also likely to report that their college used a combination of assessment techniques.

☐ Coherence Is Closely Related to Satisfaction

The attribute most highly correlated with satisfaction with the general education was coherence (.81). Those who reported that their colleges' general education programs were coherent, organized, and logical were also very likely to be satisfied with the programs. The strength of this correlation indicates that coherence is a particularly important factor in relationship to faculty members' satisfaction with their college's general education programs.

☐ Constant Review

Review and reform of general education seems to have been a focus on campuses for at least two decades now. The study found more than two-thirds of the respondents indicating that their college or program had reviewed the general education program within the last two years.

☐ Comments Indicate Change

Significant change does seem to be occurring. The fact that 170 respondents chose to add written comments about the strength of their colleges' general education programs and that 153 took time to comment on program weaknesses can be viewed as an indicator of the current attention paid to general education reform. It is also worth noting that the comments, which came from a cross-section of full-time faculty, reflected many of the aspects of the NCA guidelines for general education. The comments seemed to indicate that a good deal of discussion and work was occurring in the area of general education as it relates to accreditation. For example, one respondent wrote, "As a result of (the) NCA visit, we have carefully spelled out our general education outcomes. There is an effort to teach and assess those outcomes." Another respondent wrote, "We have two committees that assess the success of meeting general education goals on an on-going basis. I'm on one of the committees. Strong program." Another respondent emphasized the ongoing nature of general education development: "We are constantly re-evaluating what we are doing and why. We work with the individual."

☐ Dissatisfaction with Student Preparation Is Not Related to Faculty Satisfaction with General Education

While faculty members seemed somewhat frustrated by the level of preparation of their incoming students, that frustration did not seem to be significantly related to their level of satisfaction with their colleges' general education program, at least in the quantitative portion of the study. The frustration did surface, however, in the qualitative portion through the respondents' comments, and it was the second most frequently cited program weakness. The weakness seemed to lie more in pre-enrollment testing and placement than in the actual general education component of the curriculum. Comments such as these were common: "Because of our open door policy, many students do not enroll in remedial classes prior to taking college level classes." "The only problem is that they're taking developmental studies at the same time they're taking their major courses." "We lack mandatory placement in remedial courses, so our students often are not prepared with needed background knowledge." "Some student who have educational handicaps are allowed into classes where they may fail because they lack some basic skills necessary for success."

☐ Time Elapsed Since General Education Review

Recency of general education program review seemed to be related to both satisfaction with the general education program and perceived positive change in the program. This finding may have been related to the disproportionately large number of individuals who reported that their colleges had reviewed their general education program within the last two years. Perhaps the immediacy of that review led to a more positive view of the program, or perhaps the requirements of the NCA are causing program reviews to become more focused and outcomes-based.

Summary and Conclusions

This study demonstrated that there is a strong positive correlation between (1) the presence of the elements of the NCA's guidelines for general education programs and faculty satisfaction with their colleges' general education programs, and (2) the presence of those same elements and faculty members' perception of positive improvement in their colleges' general education programs over the past five years. Although each of the elements of the NCA's guidelines was positively correlated with satisfaction and change, the combination of those elements had among the highest correlations with both satisfaction with the general education program and perceived positive change in the general education program over a five-year period.

Satisfaction with the general education program appears to be positively related to the existence of college-wide general education goals and the presence of an individual or committee to coordinate the general education program.

Satisfaction with general education appears to be unrelated to level of preparation of incoming students, teaching area, college size, time elapsed since the last NCA comprehensive evaluation, and the college's approach to delivery of general education.

There appears to be a relationship between faculty satisfaction with the general education program, time elapsed since the last general education program review, and the method of assessment used for general education.

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Measuring Spiritual Change: Initial Findings

Will Slater

The Faithful Change Questionnaire (FCQ) is made up of eight of the more promising paper and pencil measures of spirituality (see Table 1 for list of the measures included in the FCQ). The FCQ data set was not yet complete as of this writing. However, 316 FCQ questionnaires from five of the eight participating institutions have been received, and the following preliminary analyses were conducted. The intercorrelation matrix of the total scale and subscales of the instruments that make up the FCQ is presented in Table 2. There are a number of interesting findings. Several clusters of subscales display relatively high intercorrelations. The various measures of positive religious belief or experience form one cluster. Measures of spiritual maturity developed from liberal/universalist (Genia), mainline Protestant (Benson), and conservative Evangelical (Ellison; Hall & Edwards) theological perspectives correlate positively and significantly with each other. Fundamentalism also correlates significantly and positively with these measures.

Quest and other measures of openness to the complexities of existential questions form a second cluster consisting of Batson's (BQust) and Altemeyer's Quest (AQust), Dudley's Religious Maturity Scale (RMS), and Genia's Openness Scale (SEI-SO). BQust and AQust scales, which ostensibly measure the same construct, share only 22 percent common variance. The scales measuring openness and doubt correlate negatively with the positive religious experience measures in the first cluster.

One construct that is difficult to place in either of these two clusters is Benson's measure of horizontal religious commitment (FMS-H). This subscale, which involves a commitment to the social justice aspects of the gospel, displays modest positive correlations with several measures in both the positive religious experience cluster and the openness and doubt cluster.

All of the 17 correlations between social desirability and the various religious measures are below 0.20, and only three are statistically significant.

An analysis of variance (see Table 3) was conducted to allow cross-sectional comparisons of first-year students and seniors. Several measures discriminate significantly between first-year and senior students: AQust ($p < .000$), the Spiritual Assessment Inventory's Realistic Acceptance (SAI-RA) ($p < .020$), Benson et al.'s Horizontal (FMS-H) ($p < .016$) and Benson et al.'s Vertical (FMS-V) ($p < .053$), Altemeyer and Hunsberger's Religious Fundamentalism (RFS) ($p < .001$), Dudley and Cruise's Religious Maturity (RMS) ($p < .001$), Genia's Openness Scale (SEI-SO) ($p < .001$), and her Spiritual Experience Index (SEI) ($p < .009$). Examination of the means in Table 3 reveals that AQust, RMS, FMS-H, SEI-SO, and SEI all were higher for seniors. However, SAI-RA, FMS-V, and RFS were all lower for seniors.

Discussion

The intercorrelations of the various measures are consistent with their content as revealed by the coherent clusters of subscales. It is encouraging to find that measures of spiritual experience/belief from diverse theological perspectives correlate with each other significantly and positively. Openness instruments like AQust and BQust, and related constructs like SEI-SO and RMS, with its open-minded commitment aspect, correlate moderately and positively with each other and negatively with the measures of positive religious experience. These relationships may reflect the tension inherent between openness and doubt versus depth of positive religious experience. The dimensionality underlying the openness instruments—particularly AQust and BQust, which were intended to measure the same construct (but account for only 20 percent common variance)—needs to be investigated and perhaps subscales need to be developed. It is interesting that neither Quest scale (discounting the small 0.14 correlation of AQust) is related to the FMS-H dimension, a measure of one's commitment to the social justice aspects of the gospel, with its emphases on rejecting racism and concern for the poor. However, both the spiritual experience and belief-oriented scales and the other openness measures do correlate with FMS-H. The openness instruments have their highest negative correlations with fundamentalism. Fundamentalism traditionally correlates positively with prejudice and is considered to be a better predictor of prejudice than the original Intrinsic/Extrinsic religious orientation constructs.

It was a pleasant surprise to find very little influence of social desirability on these measures. Still, the influence of social desirability should be investigated with the full data set to determine if one or the other of the underlying dimensions of social desirability may influence scores on some of the instruments. It may be necessary to control for social desirability on those instruments where the influence, even if modest, is still significant.

In this cross-sectional sample regarding faith development, seniors scored significantly higher than first-year students did on the openness dimension and on FMS-H (horizontal religion), but lower on two of the positive religious experience scales and on RFS (fundamentalism). These data, when viewed in conjunction with the correlations among measures discussed earlier, suggest a complex picture regarding faith changes over the college years. It may be that the existential doubt reflected by the Quest concept is something that results from four years of liberal arts education. A broadening of one's perspective may be the positive benefit of such an education at the expense, perhaps, of one's certainty with regard to personal faith matters. However, such broadening may not always lead to a more socially responsible orientation (as reflected in the lack of correlations with the FMS-H). It may be that Quest, with its inherent existential doubt, may undercut one's moral basis for caring (assuming FMS-H taps caring in some way). On the other hand, religious beliefs do seem to be related to FMS-H; those who retain higher levels of religious belief, either the more Evangelical (SAI and SMI) or more liberal (SEI-SS), also retain a moral basis for their social concern, some degree of certainty about God.

Is it the case that RMS (a open form of religious maturity) and SEI-SO (openness) reflect a religion that retains the moral basis for caring (some degree of certainty about God) even in the presence of theological uncertainty (spiritual openness)? Do the scales like SAI-A, SMI, and SEI-SS tap social consciousness (traditionally a liberal ideology) in the context of a personal faith that is undergirded by more theological certainty? In other words, these scales may capture two somewhat different religious orientations: (1) more liberally oriented, socially sensitive persons whose faith is alive in the context of doubt; and (2) more conservative, Evangelical persons who are also socially sensitive but more theologically certain. Quest may tap the doubt component at the expense of the moral belief component, and RFS may tap the religious certainty component at the expense of social sensitivity (both have negligible correlations with FMS-H).

This conceptualization is admittedly a speculative extrapolation from the correlational data; but if it is supported by the longitudinal and qualitative data, this would clearly have some meaningful implications for liberal arts education in the context of religious institutions. Liberal arts education may foster the opening up of one's belief system, creating a broader perspective. The religious institutional context seeks to foster the development of a coherent religious worldview. In the ideal outcome, the student emerges with a broader perspective on the God in whom he or she believes and has a moral sense that informs social sensitivity. Openness and doubt without a moral framework becomes skepticism and disenfranchisement; religious belief without openness becomes insensitive fundamentalism. The data to date suggest tension but also synergy between the goals of liberal arts education and religious contextualization of that education.

Clearly, the inverse relationship between the openness and doubt cluster and the positive spiritual experiences cluster needs further study in an effort to understand the role each of these aspects plays in spiritual/faith development. This is a very important issue that demands further study. Since the current data are cross-sectional, confirmation of these conceptualizations awaits the longitudinal data we are proposing to gather. We will strive to determine whether the apparent decline in the spiritual belief/experience dimension is a true and lasting one or whether it is a forerunner of a greater and more authentic maturity developed by the students as they wrestle with the difficult existential issues of life. Perhaps out of this struggle they develop a spirituality/faith that is their own, that cares about the plight of the poor and others in need, and that can better weather life's storms.

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Measuring Spiritual Change: Initial Findings

Table 1. Measures in the Faithful Change Questionnaire

Abbreviation	Instrument	Author
AQust	Quest	Altemeyer & Hunsberger
BQust	Quest	Batson & Schoenrade
SAI	Spiritual Assessment Inventory	Hall & Edwards
SAI-A	Awareness (sub-scale)	Hall & Edwards
SAI-D	Disappointment (sub-scale)	Hall & Edwards
SAI-G	Grandiosity (sub-scale)	Hall & Edwards
SAI-I	Instability (sub-scale)	Hall & Edwards
SAI-RA	Realistic Acceptance (sub-scale)	Hall & Edwards
FMS	Faith Maturity Scale	Benson et al.
FMS-H	Horizontal (sub-scale)	Benson et al.
FMS-V	Vertical (sub-scale)	Benson et al.
RFS	Religious Fundamentalism Scale	Altemeyer & Hunsberger
RMS	Religious Maturity Scale	Dudley & Cruise
SDB	Social Desirability	Marlowe-Crowne
SMI	Spiritual Maturity Index	Ellison
SEI	Spiritual Experience Inventory	Genia
SEI-R	Spiritual Experience Inventory – Revised	Genia
SEI-SO	Spiritual Openness (sub-scale)	Genia
SEI-SS	Spiritual Support (sub-scale)	Genia

Measuring Spiritual Change: Initial Findings

Table 2.
Instrument and Subscale Intercorrelations

	AQust	BQust	SAI-A	SAI-D	SAI-G	SAI-I	SAI-RA	FMS-H	FMS-V	FMS	SDB	RFS	RMS	SMI	SEI-SO	SEI-SS	SEI-R
BQust	47**																
SAI-A	-36**	-16**															
SAI-D	12*	27**	-14*														
SAI-G	-04	02	11	22**													
SAI-I	16**	23**	-27**	55**	38**												
SAI-RA	-28**	-19**	38**	-03	-08	-19**											
FMS-H	14*	06	25**	10	10	-01	15**										
FMS-V	-38**	-17**	74**	-09	10	-23**	53**	34**									
FMS	-25**	-15*	68**	-07	09	-24**	49**	66**	87**								
SDB	09	07	-16*	15*	-02	14*	-08	-11 89*	-13*	-19**							
RFS	-48**	-25**	38**	-09	07	-08	37**	-05	44**	35**	-10						
RMS	51**	36**	-13*	10	-01	08	-57	35**	-12*	05	02	-38**					
SMI	-36**	-15**	63**	-07	09	-18**	50**	25**	70**	65**	-09	49**	-17**				
SEI-SO	50**	34**	-23**	08	-01	03	-24**	22**	-28**	-15**	01	-56**	50**	-34**			
SEI-SS	-34**	-13*	66**	-07	05	-14*	51**	31**	80**	75**	-07	46**	-03	72**	-28**		
SEI-R	05	13*	45**	-01	04	-11	29**	45**	53**	59**	-06	02	33**	42**	46**	72**	
SEI	10	15**	38**	01	-04	-14*	26**	47**	47**	58**	02	-01	39**	40**	38**	66**	89**

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Measuring Spiritual Change: Initial Findings

Table 3.
Cross-Sectional Comparisons Means, Standard Deviations, and Anova Results

Instrument	Classification	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
AQust	First Year	145	49.26	7.68	13.12	0.000
	Seniors	73	53.71	10.09		
BQust	First Year	144	41.47	4.85	1.43	0.233
	Seniors	73	42.30	4.89		
SAI-A	First Year	145	3.84	0.70	3.39	0.067
	Seniors	73	3.64	0.87		
SAI-D	First Year	145	2.61	1.03	0.60	0.441
	Seniors	73	2.50	1.00		
SAI-G	First Year	145	1.67	0.62	0.95	0.332
	Seniors	73	1.59	0.48		
SAI-I	First Year	145	2.20	0.81	0.17	0.676
	Seniors	73	2.15	0.85		
SAI-RA	First Year	144	4.33	0.77	5.47	0.020
	Seniors	73	4.05	0.88		
FMS-H	First Year	145	3.93	0.59	5.95	0.016
	Seniors	73	4.15	0.67		
FMS-V	First Year	145	5.09	0.63	3.77	0.053
	Seniors	73	4.90	0.77		
FMS	First Year	145	4.43	0.43	0.23	0.630
	Seniors	73	4.40	0.52		
SDB	First Year	117	12.31	3.88	1.53	0.217
	Seniors	65	13.03	3.57		
RFS	First Year	145	79.99	10.89	11.08	0.001
	Seniors	73	74.10	14.80		
RMS	First Year	145	39.41	7.61	12.34	0.001
	Seniors	73	43.21	7.34		
SEI-SO	First Year	144	32.26	7.05	0.93	0.337
	Seniors	73	35.56	6.45		
SEI-SS	First Year	144	66.22	8.71	1.92	0.167
	Seniors	73	64.90	10.86		
SEI-R	First Year	144	98.48	9.46	6.96	0.009
	Seniors	73	100.47	10.99		
SEI	First Year	144	158.70	13.16	1.38	0.242
	Seniors	73	163.75	13.65		
SMI	First Year	144	134.27	17.69	11.22	0.001
	Seniors	73	131.00	22.41		

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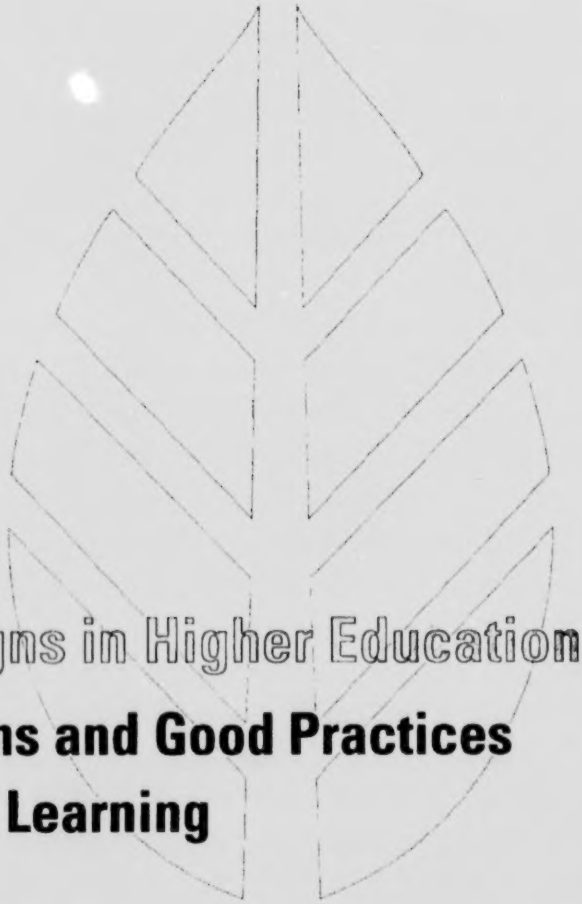

Chapter 6

New Designs in Higher Education

New Designs and Good Practices in Distance Learning

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago

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Learning Community @ Capella University

Allen Jaisle
Scott Lindgren
Michael Petkovich

This presentation will share the experience of Capella University in establishing the *Learning Community @ Capella University,* a web-enabled system to encourage and promote the development of a learning community to enhance online learning. The learning community includes several elements: learner web sites to showcase their learning projects; learner and faculty discussion forums; academic advising communications; team-based cooperative learning; and support centers, such as the development of a Thinking Habits Center, which will focus attention and dialogue on learning to develop first-rate thinking habits equal to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Challenge of Creating a Learning Community

A key challenge common to online learning is the *social isolation of learners* from each other, from faculty, and from other supporting resources. Put yourself in the place of an online learner who is miles and worlds apart from other learners, faculty, and support services.

- You feel like you are on your own, just you and your computer, struggling to learn a new subject in an unfamiliar learning format.
- You feel so alone facing a major learning challenge, and you cannot easily have a two-way conversation with your classmates or your teacher.
- When you get stuck, you wonder whom you can ask for help. You do not know what confidence you can place on the advice of people you do not know well.
- You wonder whether others can understand your problem and whether they can actually help you. You may think you are the only one who does not understand.
- Finally, when at long last you find a solution, you may feel that there is no one to appreciate and celebrate your success.

Capella University is developing the *Learning Community @ Capella University* premised on the conviction that: *learning is a* ***social experience*** *requiring a mutually supportive community of learning.* The presentation will address Capella University's thinking and experience with developing the theory and practice of an online learning community in our new School of Undergraduate Studies. Building community in online learning is a common challenge for every program of online learning, so the presentation will also provide a forum for engaging all participants in identifying learning community issues and promising solutions.

Issues to Be Addressed in the Session

- Why is *learning a social experience* requiring a mutually supportive community of learning?
- What are the *unique social isolation problems* inherent in online learning?

- What are the *unique community building opportunities* inherent in online learning?
- What has *Capella University's experience* been in building the web-enabled learning community for the School of Undergraduate Studies?
- How can *cooperative learning* contribute to and benefit from online learning community building?
- What has been the *experience of session participants* with both the problems and opportunities of community building in online learning?

Learning as Social Experience Requiring a "Learning Community"

There has been a growing recognition that learning is a social experience requiring a supportive *learning community*, especially for online learning. *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace* by Palloff and Pratt and *Facilitating Online Learning* by Collison, et al., are excellent books that address learning communities online.

During the development of the School of Undergraduate Studies, we at Capella University asked ourselves the two fundamental questions that relate to learning communities:

- What is *learning?*
- What is *community?*

Our tentative answers to these questions are:

> *The purpose of a learning experience in a course or program is to enable learners with the competencies to join the conversation of and to actively participate in a living community of practice* (*Curriculum as Conversation* by Applebee, and *Communities of Practice* by Wenger).
>
> *Community is a dynamic whole that emerges when a group of people share common practices, are interdependent, make decisions jointly, identify themselves with something larger than the sum of their individual relationships, and make a long-term commitment to well-being (their own, one another's, and the group's) (Creating Community Anywhere* by Shaffer and Anundsen).

The image we have of learning community is that of a series of concentric circles representing larger and larger communities of conversation and communities of practice. The innermost circle begins with the learner, expanding to the virtual team community, the virtual classroom community, the university community, and the community of professional practice.

The ultimate learning objective is to prepare the learner to participate in the outer circle of the community of professional practice. To do this we must enable the learner with the foundational domain knowledge and professional habits needed to enter the professional community of practice. Once in this outer circle of the community of professional practice, the learner can continue learning through learning conversations and learning practice as the profession evolves—that is, providing we have prepared the learner with a solid knowledge foundation and good professional habits. Of course, learners will periodically need to engage in a formal learning experience to enable them to shift from one community of practice to another.

Online Learning Isolation and Community Building Opportunities

Online learning has both isolation problems and community opportunities inherent in the dispersed networked technology it is based on. While learners are not physically near each other, they are connected through the *relational technology* of the Internet. Our challenge is how to make the most of the relationship building potential of this technology.

The community building experience explored by the School of Undergraduate Studies at Capella University includes the following:

- ◇ **Learner web site and e-portfolio of learning.** Each learner develops a personal learning web site within the *Learning Community @ Capella University*, a set of learner, faculty, staff, and learning center web sites hosted by Capella University. This gives learners the opportunity to showcase their work as a way of communicating with the community of professional practice they wish to enter into or to advance in.

- ◇ **Professional learning projects.** A learner's work consists primarily in producing projects that reflect the professional practice of the professional community the learner wishes to join. This is active learning by doing the work of the profession, rather than just learning about the work of the profession.
- ◇ **Team-based learning.** Learning projects are both personal and team-based. On team-based projects, learners learn to collaborate in a small five-person work team reflecting professional practice. This requires overcoming not only the hurdles of effective *collaborative teamwork* in general, but it also requires mastering the challenges of *virtual teamwork*.
- ◇ **Active cooperative learning.** The learning strategy of the School of Undergraduate Studies at Capella University is premised on active cooperative learning (as pioneered in *Active Learning* by Johnson, Johnson, and Smith). The challenge is to translate the classroom-based active cooperative learning to the virtual online learning process. We will be presenting our tentative findings on what these challenges are and how to overcome them.
- ◇ **Professional habits.** An additional challenge that we have set for ourselves at Capella University is to develop in learners powerful professional habits, at the same time they learn the foundational domain knowledge for the community of practice they are preparing for. We have developed ten *Thinking Habits of Mind, Heart, and Imagination* to provide professional habits to learners. These are being translated into rubrics for coaching and grading learners, along with the coaching and grading of the mastery of the domain knowledge. We have found that mastering the language of the Thinking Habits is the first step to mastery of the professional habits themselves.
- ◇ **Academic advising, virtual lab assistance, and discussion forums.** We have discovered that multiple ways of connecting to learners are important in reducing isolation and enriching the sense of supportive community. First, an academic advisor is in communication in multiple ways in the early stages of the learner's degree program. This includes facilitation of a group discussion forum for new learners. Other discussion forums outside of the normal class dialogue are being explored as well, including discussion forums for faculty. The Information Technology Program is developing a virtual laboratory environment as an analog to the on-campus computer laboratory. We are also exploring ways of supporting learners with virtual lab assistance.

Format and Style of the Presentation

Allen Jaisle, Associate Dean, will present an overview of the learning goals and architecture of the School of Undergraduate Studies, which requires the development of an effective and supportive community of learners. Scott Lindgren, Manager of eLearning Systems, will describe and demonstrate the web-enabled *Learning Community @ Capella University*. Mike Petkovich, Lead Instructional Designer, will engage session participants in a cooperative learning experience to identify and share their perspectives on the problems and opportunities of online learning community building.

Active Learning: Engaging the Participants

To put the online learning community experience of Capella University in a larger context in common, the session participants will be engaged in an active learning experience that involves a structured cooperative learning experience to (1) identify the perspectives of participants on the social isolation problems and opportunities inherent in online learning, and (2) share the experience of participants with building learning communities for online learning.

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Institutional Support for Distance Learning: Lessons Learned in the Context of Recent Accreditation Guidelines

Gregory Sojka
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Distance learning (DL) has become an important part of higher education's strategic planning to provide courses to working, site-bound students. This growing interest and involvement in DL by more and more institutions of higher education also make educators rethink and reevaluate the pedagogy and practice in their teaching. The increasing scrutiny of quality control on distance learning from both the public and the accreditation agencies will require even higher standards for DL. Institutional-initiated support for involving faculty in designing and developing online courses becomes crucial, as has been recognized by many institutions, in making such strategic planning successful. This belief has now been reinforced more emphatically in the forthcoming guidelines currently still circulated in their draft format from the eight accreditation bodies on the evaluation of distance learning, which emphasizes the institutional support for a successful distance learning program. This document emphasizes adequate and appropriate staffing and technical assistance, an ongoing program of appropriate technical design, and production support for participating faculty members (NCA 2000). As one of the many institutions in the nation that have been engaged in the utilization of Internet technology to enhance distance learning, the University of Rio Grande has made tremendous efforts in initiating and sustaining faculty development workshops on the development of Internet courses. Lessons learned from our efforts will be of particular value to other institutions in their efforts to develop their DL courses and programs in terms of planning, organization, content, evaluation, technical support, faculty selection, objective feedback, and modification for future faculty training workshops.

Background

The administration started the initiative to conduct faculty workshops on distance learning course development in 1999. All faculty were invited to submit proposals to design and develop online courses, which were reviewed by a special committee to select participants for the first distance learning workshop. Seven faculty from nursing, English, music, education, and technology were selected and attended a week-long workshop in the summer of 1999 conducted by campus computing staff. Topics of basic computer technology, Internet skills, web page design, and the courseware platform, Blackboard, were covered. Participating faculty received a computer, a printer, and a scanner, provided by the institution. Upon completion of their course(s), they would also receive a development stipend. A four-credit course would pay a $1000 stipend. Some 20 courses were proposed and designed by those participating faculty. Several were used either as web-based or web-enhanced courses in the following academic year, 1999-2000. The following summer of 2000 saw the second such faculty workshop. Six additional faculty representing sociology, English, philosophy, medical technology, and nursing participated in the second workshop. This workshop included a new courseware platform, WebCT, replacing Blackboard. Currently, some 20 additional courses are being developed using this new courseware platform. Lessons learned in the process of engaging faculty in the distance learning endeavor in the past two years include the following four aspects:

- The need for strong institutional support
- The need for appropriate evaluation of faculty workshops
- The need for more planning and considerations of other issues involved in e-course development
- The need to utilize our own faculty trainers for faculty workshops.

The Need for Strong Institutional Support

The administration must provide leadership as well as technology support. Organizing faculty workshops in DL, inviting faculty and screening applicants, developing agenda, and securing funding for necessary equipment purchase cannot be overemphasized. When the administration makes such efforts and provides adequate support, faculty feel more motivated and willing to participate. The two institutional Summer Institutes had thirteen faculty member participants, 16 percent of the faculty. We hope that the third Summer Institute will attract even more faculty.

The Need for Appropriate Evaluation of Faculty Workshops

The success of a faculty workshop needs to be evaluated against a set of pre-articulated workshop outcomes. Our first faculty DL workshop did not receive adequate evaluation. Faculty attended the workshop, listened to the technical staff members explain selected technical features, and began to work on their own courses. No feedback of effectiveness or usefulness of the workshop presentation was collected. Such inefficiency and lack of evaluation were later recognized, and changes were made for the second workshop in both the content and format. The second workshop, however, was evaluated in both content and format. Without evaluation, faculty would flounder and DL workshops would fail.

The Need for More Planning and Other Issues Involved in e-Course Development

Participating faculty raised other issues involved in e-course development, such as marketing online courses, enrollment minimums and maximums, and an online course designation in the university database, all of which called for more consideration by the school administration.

The Need to Utilize Our Own Faculty Trainers for Faculty Workshops

Normally, faculty workshops on DL are conducted by campus computer staff whose technology expertise and knowledge seem to make such people qualified trainers. This belief creates a misperception that e-courses simply transform classroom materials into online teaching. Actually, faculty who have more experience in using such courseware programs can offer more sound e-pedagogical help to their colleagues than can the technical experts.

We must develop new theories regarding student learning in this technology-enhanced environment. This new learning environment, appropriately called e-learning, displays unique elements that characterize the teaching and learning processes: e-interactivity, e-assessment, e-course design, e-delivery, and e-class management.

Future workshops should utilize experienced faculty as faculty trainers well versed in e-pedagogy. Currently, a series of faculty-initiated mini-workshops has been planned and offered at our campus, facilitated by a faculty member. Each weekly workshop focuses on technical skills and pedagogical issues. Evaluation of the effectiveness of each workshop will be considered in planning the next workshop.

This session would be of particular interest to those who are directly involved in web-based/enhanced courses: administrators, assessment directors/coordinators, faculty, and campus technology support staff. Other institutions involved in DL could avoid our mistakes and make better progress on their campuses. Since e-learning is still in its infancy, audience participation could contribute to our session. Such sharing among session participants can be developed into future topics of interest at next year's NCA Annual Meeting.

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Benchmarking Best Practices in Online Learning Communities

Helen R. Connors
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During the past few years, institutions of higher education have committed billions of dollars to the use of advanced telecommunications technology for distance or distributed learning. Today, the most popular of these technologies is web-based education. As this on-line learning marketplace expands, both supporters and critics are calling for outcome data related to the success of these new technologies and their impact on teaching and learning. One process for establishing and improving quality outcomes is benchmarking.

Best Practices and Benchmarking

Benchmarking has gained popularity in the business sector as a research approach that discovers "best practices" in whatever process is designated for study. It is a process improvement technique that provides factual data to allow institutions to compare performance on specific variables in order to achieve best performance. Although this process is employed routinely in the business world, health care, and nursing service, it is infrequently adopted in the higher education arena.

Since spring 1999, three large state institutions that span the central part of the United Stated have collaborated on a benchmarking project to determine best practices in on-line learning communities for nursing courses. Representatives from the three institutions, partnered with a consultant from the Flashlight Program (www.tltgroup.org/programs/flashlight.html) to develop, implement, and evaluate an instrument to assess outcomes of web-based nursing courses.

Benchmarking Process

The first step in the benchmarking process is to determine what to benchmark. The variables selected for this benchmarking project were derived from frameworks and models used in nursing and higher education to illuminate the impact of the use of technology.

The next steps are to enlist partners and define a mapping process. The three schools involved in this study collaborated with the Flashlight Program team to ensure that the research would provide a broad base of potential practice differences that could be revealed in the benchmarking process. The mapping process was based on the use of the technology, the course development process, and design for curriculum outcomes that are common to all three schools of nursing.

Developing the Survey Instrument

The instrument used to collect the benchmarking data for this study was adapted from the Flashlight Program Current Student Inventory (CSI) Toolkit. The CSI is designed to assess the student's views of technology-based teaching and learning (Ehrmann and Zuniga, 1997). It consists of a series of questions clustered into fourteen themes or subscales that focus on the various reasons for using technology to enhance learning outcomes. These fourteen principles incorporate and expand the "Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" developed earlier by Chickering and Gamson (1987). The adapted survey used in this study consists of 52 items. Forty items elicit student perceptions of the specific outcomes, educational practices, and use of technology. Using a 5-point Likert scale, respondents are directed to indicate to what extent they disagree or agree on items, when comparing the web-based course to a course that primarily uses face-to-face communication. Ten items obtain demographic data about the students and their educational experiences. Two open-ended questions ask students what they found to be best about the course or what needs to be improved. Content and construct validity of the items for the instrument was established prior to initiating the study. The reliability of the survey instrument was established from the sample of students participating in this study. Chronbach's alpha for the total instrument was .85.

Gathering Performance Data

Data for the pilot study were gathered from 219 students enrolled in courses offered primarily on the World Wide Web (www) at three schools of nursing during the fall semester 1999. Descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation, ANOVA, and t-test) were used to analyze the data. Content analysis was used to analyze the data from the two open-ended questions. For the purposes of this study, the mean for each indicator is reported as the benchmark. Findings are reported on the aggregated data across the three schools.

Results

The educational practices and outcomes enabled by the technology are revealed by the results of the study on each of the performance indicators–outcomes, educational practices, and use of technology. Findings are reported on the aggregated data across the three schools participating in the study.

Demographics

Ninety percent of the 219 students who participated in the study were females. Twenty-four percent of the students were age 20–29; 34 percent were age 30–39; 34 percent were age 40–49, and seven percent were over 50 years of age. Ninety-three percent of the students identified their race as white. It was determined that approximately 80 percent of the students had taken between two and six other web courses. Fifty-six percent of the students lived less than 30 miles from the campus, and 21 percent lived more than 100 miles from the campus.

Outcomes

Intended outcomes measured by this study were accessibility, convenience, sense of connectedness, socialization to the profession, and computer proficiency. Survey respondents indicated that the courses were definitely accessible and convenient (M=3.7, SD=.79). They also believed that the course provided adequate socialization (M=3.5, SD=1.01) into their professional role; however, they did perceive a sense of isolation or lack of connectedness (M=3.7, SD=.79) with faculty and peers. In general survey students were satisfied (M=3.7, SD=.79) with the web courses and indicated that they would continue to take additional web courses, if offered. Although some students perceived that they struggled with computer proficiency and that this interfered with their learning, ratings of their abilities to use the technology improved significantly from the beginning to the end of the course (t=95.7, p=<.01).

Educational Practices

- **Time on task.** Students in this study reported spending 6–10 hours per week participating in coursework. Students neither agreed nor disagreed (M=3.17, SD=1.14) that they spent more time studying in the web course than they did in a course offered on campus.

- **Active learning.** Active learning requires the student to be a participant in the learning process. Previous research indicated that active learning contributes to positive course outcomes and satisfaction. In this study, the benchmark indicated that students perceived that they were actively involved in the learning process (M=3.3, SD=.84).

◇ **Feedback.** Feedback about processes and progress in the course is essential to attaining outcomes. Students in this study perceived that they were, in fact, receiving prompt feedback in their web courses (M=3.7, SD=1.01).

◇ **Interaction with peers and faculty.** Interactions with peers and faculty are essential components of the learning process. Students in this study were somewhat less likely to interact with peers in the web courses than in a traditional classroom (M=2.7, SD=1.03). Students also were somewhat less likely to interact with the faculty when compared to interacting in a course that uses face-to-face discussion (M=2.3, SD=1.06).

Use of Technology

Technology (hardware and software) used to offer web courses must be reliable, accessible, and support productive use of time. In this study, students disagreed that the technology contributed to good use of their time (M=2.6, SD=1.07) and provided a reliable infrastructure (M=2.2, SD=.77). There were geographical differences in students' perception of the utility and effectiveness of the technology. For example, students who lived farther from the campus (>51 miles) found that the technology was less able to support productive use of time (F=4.12, df=4,213, p=<.01) and that the infrastructure was less reliable (F=3.0, df=4,212, p=<.02).

Implications and Applications

The results of this study across the three schools provide useful and relevant data about web-based education. The individual school and aggregated data allow for the comparison to our framework of "best practices." The results can be used by individual faculty to strengthen or improve their teaching-learning strategies and by the instructional design person to foster the use of these "best practices" in teaching and learning. In addition, administrators can examine data in terms of technology support for both students and faculty. All can query the data for the attainment of outcomes of a particular course or program.

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Chapter 7

New Designs in Higher Education

New Designs and Good Practices in Adult Learner Programs

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Building Blocks for the Adult Learning Focused Institution

Thomas A. Flint
Ruth Frey

Adult Learners: The New Undergraduate Majority

The stereotyped image of the college student as one who is 18-23 years old in residential, full-time study is being challenged by a new reality. The U.S. economy is now information-driven, and a college degree has become an increasingly important credential in the marketplace, both for new entrants into the labor force and those already employed. Working adults who want to succeed in the present economic climate are pursuing a college education in increasing numbers, and they are creating a new majority among undergraduates at college campuses across the country.

Adult students are loosely identified with a larger group characterized as nontraditional. While definitions vary, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has come up with seven characteristics that typically define nontraditional students. According to the NCES, adult students often:

- Have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education
- Attend part-time
- Are financially independent of parents
- Work full-time while enrolled
- Have dependents other than a spouse
- Are a single parent
- Lack a standard high school diploma.

By using one or a combination of these criteria, NCES estimates that more than 60 percent of students in U.S. higher education can be characterized as nontraditional. Using the simpler and more common criterion of age to define adult learner, we know that some 43 percent (or 14 million) of students in U.S. higher education are 25 or older. And, astonishingly, an estimated 65 percent increase in enrollments of students 35 years of age and older, from 1.7 million to 2.9 million, occurred between 1985 and 1996 (NCES, 1996).

The Unique Educational Needs of Adults

Many colleges and universities have struggled to adapt to this changing student marketplace, often finding themselves burdened by traditions and practices that prove ill-suited for adults. Unlike the returning veterans of World War II who went to college under the GI Bill, today's adult learners are unwilling and unable to emulate traditional-aged students either inside or outside the classroom. Adult students have unique needs, especially if they are employed. Among others, these needs include:

- Different kinds of information about their educational options
- Institutional flexibility in curricular and support services

- Academic and motivational advising supportive of their life and career goals
- Recognition of experience and work-based learning already obtained.

These needs reflect how the experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes of adult learners are different from the traditional-aged student.

Educational Principles That Work for Adults Who Work

Without good models of effective practice for serving adult learners, colleges and universities will continue to struggle. CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) has addressed this issue through an initiative designed to assist colleges and universities with improving learning opportunities for working adults.

CAEL partnered with APQC (American Productivity and Quality Center) to conduct a benchmarking study of six highly adult-learning-focused colleges and universities. This was a first step toward identifying and disseminating new models of how higher education institutions can provide the best possible educational experience for adult students (Flint & Associates, 1999).

Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners

CAEL then transformed the benchmarking study findings into principles of effective practice that have been further tested within focus groups of adult learners, educators, employers, union representatives, policymakers, and others who are interested in adult learning. These Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners describe processes and approaches to be adopted by colleges seeking to improve access by and quality for adult students. However, in order to ensure flexibility and innovation by institutions, the Principles do not prescribe particular practices or policies. Rather, they are meant to serve as a framework for assessing institutional commitment to and capacity for meeting the needs of adults, and also to form the backbone of what CAEL calls the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI).

The eight Principles are:

1. **Outreach.** The institution conducts its outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers in time, place, and tradition in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities.
2. **Life and career planning.** The institution addresses adult learners' life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.
3. **Financing.** The institution promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.
4. **Assessment of learning outcomes.** The institution defines and assesses the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by adult learners both from the curriculum and from life/work experience in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor.
5. **Teaching-learning process.** The institution's faculty uses multiple methods of instruction for adult learners, including experiential and problem-based methods, in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills.
6. **Student support systems.** The institution assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students' capacities to become self-directed lifelong learners.
7. **Technology.** The institution uses information technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience.
8. **Strategic partnerships.** The institution engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners.

These statements are further described and expanded on in CAEL's executive summary, *Serving Adult Learners in Higher Education: Principles of Effectiveness* (CAEL, August 2000). Colleges and universities have incorporated the

Principles into their self-assessment processes. CAEL is also working with several state higher education governing boards to design ways for state institutions to better respond to the education needs of adults and business and industry.

At the time of publication of this briefing paper, CAEL is designing an *Adult Learning Focused Institution Workbook*, a self-improvement guide based on the Principles. The focus of CAEL's presentation at the North Central Association Annual Meeting will be to introduce of CAEL's workbook and to engage attendees in assessing current practices and considering new ways of helping adults achieve a college education.

Summary

CAEL undertook this project with the aim of fostering improvement among institutions of higher education in an effort to assure adult learners an accessible and effective education. It is our belief that the adoption of the Principles will result in positive, concrete, and visible changes for our nation's adult learners.

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Assessing Faculty Quality in Adult Programs: Best Practices for Faculty Hiring, Orientation, and Evaluation

Mark A. Smith
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A comprehensive orientation program for adjunct and part-time faculty has a two-fold purpose: to provide a connection between these individuals and the institution, and to prepare them to succeed in the classroom. As colleges and universities change to meet current challenges, part-time and adjunct faculty are bearing more of the teaching load. Successful orientation of these key faculty members, therefore, is an important variable affecting institutional effectiveness.

The diverse and often conflicting challenges facing institutions of higher education are the focus of intense discussion within the higher education community. These challenges include rapid expansion at some institutions, heightened competition for most, budgetary constraints for others, and the introduction of new models of learning that affect all institutions. All of these challenges are causing a paradigmatic shift with far-reaching impact. One of the areas of institutional life on which most of these challenges eventually focus is the makeup and role of the faculty. Faculty members are being asked to envision their role differently. Perhaps more significantly, institutions are rethinking accepted notions of the composition of faculty and the place faculty occupy. Institutions are hiring new "kinds" of faculty members, offering them different relationships, and deploying them in new ways. Thompson (1995) summarizes the trend in the following way: "Like many businesses across the country, institutions of higher education have been increasing the use of part-time and/or temporary staff. Nationally, adjuncts teach between 30%-50% of all credit courses and between 95%-100% of noncredit courses." Leatherman (1997) believes that adjuncts account for 64 percent of the faculty members in two-year colleges.

As is to be expected, such changes bring confusion, anxiety, and conflict. It is not the purpose of this paper to offer judgment about these changes. Rather, this paper will make two points. First, the reality is that adjunct and part-time faculty are doing more and more of the front-line instructional work in higher education. Second, in order to prepare them to do this well, institutions must offer adjunct and part-time faculty a comprehensive program of orientation tailored to their unique needs.

In the midst of this change, some constants remain. Faculty members need to connect with their institution, to understand its mission and values, and to be prepared to meet the needs of its students. In this context, colleges can no longer avoid the responsibility to provide a comprehensive orientation program for their part-time and adjunct faculty members. Institutions must understand that the quality of this orientation and initial development is a key determinant of their institutional effectiveness. John Scott (1997) argues that, "[b]y supporting and fully integrating adjuncts, an institution's quality of instruction, collegiality, and communication increases."

One of the simplest and most important steps an institution can take to lay the groundwork for quality learning experiences in its classrooms is to ensure that every faculty member participates in comprehensive and ongoing orientation and professional development programs. The need for a comprehensive faculty orientation program increases proportionally with the level of a college's reliance on adjuncts and part-time faculty. When colleges use adjuncts sparingly to fill holes in the teaching schedule, the overall quality of instruction in the institution will likely not be greatly affected if those adjuncts are not well-oriented to the institution and their role within it. When colleges rely—whether by choice or by default—on adjuncts and part-timers (including teaching assistants, one might add) to carry a substantial portion of the teaching load, the need for such an orientation increases exponentially.

Adjunct and part-time faculty do not need to be oriented because they are not full-time. They need to be oriented because all teaching faculty need to understand the institutional context in which they work, the curriculum they will be expected to cover, and the students with whom they will be working.

The relationship of an institution with its adjunct and part-time faculty is obviously different from the relationship with its full-time faculty. When a full-time faculty member joins an institution, s/he joins a peer group of other faculty members who collectively serve the learning needs of their students and govern the academic activity of the institution. Adjunct and part-time faculty are often relegated to the fringes of the institution, doing work for which they are paid, but not becoming part of the institution's academic community. Therefore, the goal of the faculty orientation program should be to help part-timers and adjuncts connect to the institution.

What Issues Must Orientation Programs Address?

At the heart of the comprehensive orientation plan must be a process whereby adjunct and part-time faculty come to own the purpose, mission, and values of the institution in which they work. These are the foundational elements that connect faculty to and help them understand the institution.

Foundations of the Orientation Program

First, faculty must understand the purpose of the institution in which they work. The orientation program must give faculty the chance to obtain ownership of the purpose of the institution.

Second, faculty must understand the mission of the institution in which they work. Faculty must understand the unique mission of their institution because it has direct bearing on the expectations brought to bear on them by colleagues, students, and administrators.

Third, faculty should be able to share the core values that shape the ethos of an institution. A faculty member who does not know and understand the core values of his or her institution is at a disadvantage.

Content of the Orientation Program

The practical goal of a comprehensive orientation program is to ensure that adjunct and part-time faculty are prepared to offer students the very best possible learning experiences. An effective orientation program gets the relationship between faculty and the institution off to a good start. It lays the groundwork for a mutually rewarding relationship in which the faculty member helps the institution accomplish its mission while at the same time finding personal satisfaction in doing so.

To this end, building on the foundations of purpose, mission, and core values, an effective plan of orientation should address these three stages of the relationship between faculty and the institution:

- The pre-hiring stage
- The connection stage
- The preparation stage

☐ The Pre-Hiring Stage

The process whereby adjunct and part-time faculty are hired has been notoriously haphazard. All too often it has followed a scenario something like this: A quick perusal of the vita (sometimes optional), coupled with a perfunctory interrogation, followed by directions to the classroom—"The class meets Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7:30 a.m. in room 231. Please be there this Monday."

This is an invitation to disaster. Even in the most pressurized situations, where a department head must fill a teaching assignment at the very last minute, time can be taken to do better than this. The initial orientation previous to the first assignment must properly set the stage for the relationship that will follow. Here are some guidelines to follow for the pre-hiring orientation.

First, the pre-hiring orientation should articulate the process that will be used for the selection of adjunct and part-time faculty. This process should be used consistently and should not be compromised except in the most extreme emergencies. It should provide for the review of the candidate's vita, an overview of the institution's documentation, a review of the criteria by which candidates will be selected and assigned, and a set of interviews with key representatives (i.e., department chairs, deans, and full-time faculty).

Second, the pre-hiring orientation should articulate the institution's faculty selection criteria as they apply to adjuncts and part-timers. It should help candidates understand how the institution views adjuncts and part-timers, and how the criteria for selecting them are to be applied. This orientation can be especially beneficial if it is explicit about the strengths that candidates can bring to the institution, such as a wealth of professional experience or involvement in unique positions and projects.

Third, the pre-hiring orientation should give the candidate a quick overview of the institutional context. While this would not be the place to cover the foundational or the practical elements in-depth, it should give the candidate the chance to self-select in or out of the process before commitments are made on either side.

Fourth, the pre-hiring orientation should include an unambiguous discussion of the institution's expectations of faculty. The middle of the teaching assignment is not the right time for faculty and department heads to discuss differences because expectations were not made explicit from the outset.

Fifth, the pre-hiring orientation should provide the candidate with an opportunity to ask questions and state expectations. Giving candidates the chance to clarify what is going to be required of them, and to make their own expectations known, lays the groundwork for a healthier relationship in the future.

In summary, the goal of the pre-hiring orientation is to allow the institution to consistently identify individuals who match the institutional mission and who can contribute true value to its students. A good pre-hiring orientation process will give candidates the chance to self-select in or out of the institution based on their knowledge of themselves, their commitments, and their strengths and weaknesses.

☐ The "Connection" Stage

Once a person has been asked to serve as an adjunct or part-time faculty member, the focus of orientation shifts from selection to connection. Adjunct and part-time faculty members usually do not have the benefit of the formal and informal systems that help full-time faculty connect with the institution; there are no formal interviews with the personnel department, no departmental dinners with introductions, no informal invitations to lunch or the fitness center, no passing conversations in the hallways, no frank talks about the structure of the institution and the relationships between its departments, and no departmental meetings. In short, there will be few opportunities for established faculty to pass along the ethos of the community. There will be no opportunity for adjuncts and part-timers to gather those all-important tips and cues about the way things get done.

Two things must certainly be true in this situation. First, adjunct and part-time faculty will serve the institution better if they understand its ethos. Second, part-time faculty will not become connected to the institution without a purposeful system of orientation. Some institutions have responded to this need (one will be discussed later) by creating intensive orientation experiences that bring adjunct and part-time faculty to campus and, in effect, treat them as full-time faculty members during their initial exposure to the institution. The initial orientation plan that connects the adjunct to the institution, then, should incorporate the following features.

First, as discussed earlier, it must provide ample opportunity for the faculty member to become familiar with the mission, purposes, and core values of the institution. While these will have been communicated in overview fashion in the pre-hiring stage, the initial orientation provides an opportunity for in-depth coverage of these foundational elements. The faculty member must be given the opportunity to find his or her own points of connections and tension with these elements. In doing so, the aim will be to formulate an understanding of the contribution s/he will make to the accomplishment of the mission.

Second, the initial orientation must acquaint the faculty member with the "nuts and bolts" of the policies and procedures he or she will be expected to follow. Here is an all-too-frequent scenario from the classroom of an adjunct professor. A student, quite innocently and appropriately, asks a question about a procedure or policy of the institution. Adjuncts don't wear name tags to differentiate them from the institution's "real" professors. Hence, students expect them to be able to give guidance. But because the adjunct was not oriented well, does not know the answer, and, more importantly, does not see himself as a part of the university, he dodges the question by saying, "I don't know. You'll have to ask the university." When this happens, everyone in the situation loses. Both the adjunct and the institution lose credibility. The student loses faith. It becomes harder for the adjunct to accomplish the mission for which s/he was hired. This is why adjunct faculty need to understand the policies and procedures of the institution—not to spare the registrar's or the department chair's office headaches, but to serve students better and to preserve credibility. Ultimately, the goal of this part of the initial orientation is not to master policies, but for adjuncts and part-timers to be able to act as part of the university community.

Third, the initial orientation should allow faculty to form departmental relationships. Colleges and universities are made up of people who accomplish their work by means of a diverse set of relationships. The value of the education offered within the context of a healthy academic department is not determined simply by the quality of the discrete classroom experiences to which a student is exposed. Instead, much of the value comes from the comprehensive experience of being exposed to an academic team working together. The whole makes a greater impact on the student than the sum of its parts. In a healthy academic department, faculty colleagues refer to one another's work, publicly agree and disagree with one another, bolster one another's arguments, and contribute to one another's work by critical interaction. By doing this, faculty challenge students to discover their own points of view. A part-time or adjunct faculty member who has not been invited into this community, nor given the chance to form the relationships it requires, is at a distinct disadvantage. But even more importantly, the students who sit in these faculty members' courses are disadvantaged. Therefore, the orientation that connects the adjunct to the university must provide him or her with the opportunity to form these departmental relationships.

Fourth, the initial orientation should provide opportunities for faculty to identify and link up with mentors. New full-time faculty often select mentors informally. For example, an established professor may serve as a young faculty member's informal guide and champion through the tenure process. This role is even more important for adjuncts and part-timers because most of them will have their primary professional relationships elsewhere. They need someone to whom they can turn for answers when problems arise, when they need new ideas, or for growth within the discipline.

Fifth, the initial orientation must establish a reliable and clearly understood means of communication between the faculty member and the leader for the department. Adjuncts and part-timers can become "lone rangers," who become adept at solving their own problems, answering their own questions, and guiding students according to their own lights. The orientation program should give them clear communication links with those to whom they can turn when answers are needed.

☐ The "Preparation" Stage

The preparation of most academics focuses almost solely on the content of their disciplines. When a new faculty member walks into the classroom for the very first time, almost nothing has been done to prepare that individual to facilitate learning. For full-time faculty, this hole is filled by trial and error within the classroom and by informal collegial sharing within the department. Neither of these two resources is available to the same degree for adjunct and part-time faculty. They teach less than full-time faculty and take longer to build up the volume of instructional experience of a full-time faculty member. As has been pointed out earlier, they are not able to draw from the same informal collegial relationships as a full-time faculty member. For the most part, they are on their own. For these reasons, a portion of their program of orientation must give them at least the basic instructional tools they will need in the classroom. Following are some of the key areas that this orientation should include.

First, new faculty should be able to prepare and use a course syllabus effectively. Some departments provide adjunct and part-time faculty with prepared syllabi. This can be an important tool for ensuring the quality of course content. Even so, adjuncts and part-timers will be more effective if they understand the function of a syllabus, know what their institution requires the syllabus to contain, and anticipate students' questions about the syllabus.

Second, new faculty should be conversant with the basic concepts of student evaluation and should have a thorough grasp of their institution's grading criteria and grading scales. No other area of classroom work will place more pressure on adjunct and part-time faculty than this one. The more tenuous the faculty member's grasp of the institution's policies, practices, and commitments, the more susceptible s/he will be to the pressure students bring to bear on the grading process.

Third, new faculty should be able to develop basic lesson plans for their classroom sessions. Unfortunately, this is a skill most college professors learn by default rather than by design. Students have come to expect something more than a steady pattern of lectures. The days are gone when faculty members can succeed relying on single-skill instructional strategies. But neither will they succeed with a disjointed and chaotic jumble of "learning activities." Adjunct and part-time faculty should know how to prepare a coherent plan that focuses the content and guides the events of each class session.

Fourth, new faculty should be forearmed with basic techniques to overcome initial anxiety and to avoid "rookie" mistakes. Anxiety can be a hurdle for all new faculty, and an especially formidable one for adjuncts and part-timers. More than one adjunct who could have become an excellent facilitator of learning gave up after one or two assignments because of the inability to confidently face a class full of students. New faculty will be better prepared if they can use such basic techniques as these:

- Establishing rapport with students before a class begins
- Being clear with the class about one's abilities and one's role as a facilitator of learning, indicating the strengths one brings as a resource for students (without shading into braggadocio)
- Being willing to admit ignorance when it exists
- Being clear and firm about course expectations without being inflexible

Fifth, new faculty will benefit from an orientation to the theoretical foundations of their work. Some discussion of the differences between pedagogy and adragogy can generate new insights about learning.

Sixth, new faculty should understand scholarship and professional development expectations. The orientation must include a discussion of the institution's expectations of adjunct and part-time faculty as they relate to scholarship and professional development.

Indiana Wesleyan University (IWU) has dealt with the challenge of preparing adjunct and part-time faculty members by developing an extensive selection and orientation program. This program is built on the conviction that the corporate leaders it recruits have the appropriate academic credentials to teach, but that they will not succeed as facilitators in its adult degree programs without careful preparation. To provide them with this preparation, IWU has focused the orientation process on four key areas:

1. Understanding the mission and purposes of the institution
2. Understanding IWU policies and practices
3. Understanding the characteristics and needs of nontraditional students
4. Understanding both pedagogical and andragogical approaches to the facilitation of learning

In order to become familiar with the IWU mission, all new adjunct and part-time faculty are required to attend two four-hour orientation sessions that emphasize the important distinctives of the university. During the first session, the institutional mission statement is reviewed, and the core values of the university are discussed. The session also includes an explanation of the learning outcomes that the university hopes each student will achieve. New faculty are challenged to embrace the fundamental goal of providing high-quality instruction for every student in every class by creating a challenging academic framework for the knowledge base, and by applying this knowledge base to the real world. Once this foundation has been laid, faculty members are able to progress to the more practical issues of institutional policies and practices.

Faculty members are introduced to the policies and practices of the university through a carefully designed set of exercises that present the policy in question, acquaint the new faculty with the potential problems that might arise around that policy, and present possible solutions to those problems. For example, a role play exercise centered on a late-arriving student focuses attention on the attendance policy, highlights the problems that experience shows occur among these classes when students habitually arrive late, and gives the opportunity to practice ways to defuse the situation. An interesting sidebar discussion can reverse the situation and focus on the impact on the class when a facilitator arrives late. Another activity focuses on the correct completion of a grade sheet for the records office (a simple but surprisingly problematic activity). The evening proceeds with practice and drill types of situations that aim to make institutional policies come to life through situations that experience has shown will occur in their teaching experience. At IWU, this segment of the orientation is geared to get the attention of the faculty, but also to reinforce the importance of following policies that have grown out of hard experience. Faculty members are presented with the IWU Faculty Handbook that has been designed explicitly for its part-time and adjunct faculty.

During the second session, new faculty explore the characteristics and needs of adult learners and match these needs with appropriate teaching methodologies. This session begins with an in-depth exploration of the comparison between teaching today's adult learners and the practices of the past. IWU believes that new faculty must be introduced to this approach because most of them will not have seen newer methodologies modeled in their own education.

Faculty are also introduced to effective pedagogical and andragogical practices. This is particularly important given the fact that most of the adjunct candidates are practitioners. These individuals are highly skilled leaders with a wealth of valuable experience to bring to the classroom. All of them possess the requisite academic credentials, many from benchmark institutions. But almost none of them have been trained in effective facilitation practices. One's grasp of the knowledge base may be outstanding, but in order to effectively facilitate learning, one must understand the different approaches to teaching. The specific topics of this session include, "Best Teaching Practices," "Grading– An Extension of the Teaching Process," "Teaching the Visual Learner," "How to Build a Syllabus," and "Preparing the Lesson Plan."

The coordinator of the IWU faculty orientation program has indicated that the single most effective change in the institution's process was the commitment to require all faculty to attend two full evenings of orientation. Internal assessment processes have shown a decline in negative student feedback about the quality of their classes since the second night of orientation was required. Institutions that spend time on faculty preparation reap rewards.

IWU supplements its orientation program with a mentor system and professional development requirements for each faculty member. These continue to enhance the process of student learning at the university. Through the establishment of faculty teaching goals, implementation of a faculty observation system that completes more than 200 peer and administrative class visits each year, the requirement of a faculty growth and development plan for all full- and part-time faculty, and the orientation process, IWU is addressing the concerns raised by many opponents of part-time and adjunct faculty.

In summary, effective orientation programs exemplify best practices in the following ways:

1. Faculty handbook for full-time and part-time faculty
2. Faculty procedures and services (phone numbers, contact points, etc.)
3. Orientation sessions (at least one or two four-hour sessions, up to an intensive four-day session)
4. Emphasis on the mission, purpose, core values, history, and distinctives of the institution
5. Focus on effective teaching practices
6. Video and technology training
7. Incentives for attendance at orientation sessions
8. Professional development course offered for credit
9. Required attendance at orientation sessions before teaching

These best practices show that an institutional commitment of people and dollars is required to effectively orient part-time and adjunct faculty members. Faculty, for their part, must also commit time to learn the appropriate procedures and best practices for becoming an effective member of an institution's faculty.

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Articulating the Roles of Off-Campus Faculty to Promote Best Practices in Adult Higher Education

Lana Ivanitskaya
Megan Goodwin

Introduction

How can a university guide, support, and develop its off-campus faculty, particularly those who teach in remote locations? How can their essential duties and responsibilities be defined? Which teaching principles and best practices can be suggested to instructors of nontraditional students? How can student learning be maximized in compressed format courses offered outside of the university's main campus? Many higher education institutions are challenged to effectively integrate their "invisible faculty" into the university community while also providing sufficient guidance with the unique aspects of extended degree programs, such as a compressed course format and diverse backgrounds of nontraditional learners (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Greive & Worden, 2000).

Competition for highly qualified off-campus instructors is keen, particularly given the rigors of part-time teaching in compressed adult learning formats. As programs grow geographically distant from campus, higher-level administrators grow increasingly isolated from the issues defining the faculty role. Faculty and students also continue to struggle to meet shifting mutual and institutional expectations, frequently without the benefit of specific guidelines to modify performance. The College of Extended Learning (CEL) at Central Michigan University (CMU) is effectively addressing issues common to all academic providers, particularly the large percentage of those with off-campus programs: the challenge of recruiting, approving, and developing the highest quality faculty. The steps CMU is taking to address these challenging issues are outlined in this paper.

Phase I: Defining the Needs

A recent initiative by the College of Extended Learning at CMU supported an institutional planning effort to incorporate the germane issues common to the university's faculty into CMU's off-campus strategic plan. More than 80 faculty members, academic department chairs, and administrators took part in 11 focus groups discussing how CMU can address the needs and concerns of its off-campus faculty. The focus group results led to appointment of an empowered task force and delivered an action-based college priority: the communication and articulation of the roles of off-campus faculty. The latest product derived from this college imperative is a seminal document articulating the roles of off-campus faculty.

Discussion yielded 649 comments in response to the following questions:

- What are our burning issues and institutional priorities relative to off-campus faculty?
- How can we better resolve faculty problems and address their concerns?
- What does leadership need to know in order to include faculty issues in organizational decision making?

Researchers categorized participants' comments by content and deduced 11 topics. Among these, faculty recruitment and approval and academic expectations were of greatest interest to participants and accounted for 42 percent of all comments. CMU's Academic Advisory Council, comprised of extended learning administrators, academic program directors, and faculty reviewed these comments and set priorities for addressing the most pressing needs. The top priority was defined as follows:

Articulation and communication of teaching/learning expectations

1. Articulate CEL's academic standards and expectations for faculty
2. Enhance the faculty handbook to address strategies for teaching adult learners in compressed course formats
3. Increase awareness of academic expectations among CEL instructors
4. Take a public stand on quality by establishing clear academic expectations.

Additional issues that have garnered the attention of the Academic Advisory Council include:

- Improved systems for the recruitment, selection, and approval of faculty
- Identification of faculty development needs; prioritization of necessary support systems
- Articulation of criteria for the evaluation of faculty performance and faculty recognition.

These issues are essential to a comprehensive, high-quality faculty system. They are being addressed using a process similar to that described in this paper. However, space limitations do not allow a complete description of these systems.

Phase II: Preparing to Maximize Adult Learning

Leadership worked with a newly appointed Faculty Project Task Force, consisting of Academic Advisory Council members, to design a document that articulated CEL's measurable expectations of its faculty. Specifically, the Task Force worked toward clarification of the faculty role in the academic process and establishment of uniform expectations.

While the Task Force drew relevant material from CEL's faculty contract and handbook, researchers from the College of Extended Learning's Center for Research on Adult Learning (CRAL) completed a thorough review of the literature on adult learning and compressed format teaching. These data were compiled into a comprehensive list of faculty responsibilities and teaching expectations drafted in measurable, behavioral terms.

The resulting document, "Maximizing Learning: CEL's Expectations for the Faculty Role and Definition of Faculty Responsibilities," listed six categories of responsibility required of all CEL faculty:

1. Plan teaching sessions
2. Integrate principles for effective adult learning in flexible delivery format instruction
3. Assess student learning using reliable and valid measures
4. Monitor and evaluate teaching
5. Prioritize professional development
6. Follow CMU/CEL procedures.

In addition, eight principles of effective teaching empirically linked to improved learning outcomes for adults in compressed course formats were identified:

1. Understand and respect individual differences
2. Set expectations and establish purpose
3. Application
4. Variety

5. Maximize and optimize learners' "time on task"
6. Communication and cooperation
7. Feedback
8. Encourage metacognitive learning.

Samples of required and recommended faculty behaviors are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Faculty Responsibilities and Teaching / Learning Practices

Required: Assess student learning using reliable and valid measures

○ At the start of the course, explain the criteria for evaluating each graded course requirement and the weight of each requirement in determining the student's final grade

○ Require multiple class assignments, including pre-course assignments

○ Design multiple assessments of learner performance that link to the course goals and objectives

Principle 5: Maximize and Optimize Learners' "Time on Task"

○ Guide students to set challenging goals for their learning

○ Communicate the importance of frequent self-paced study sessions, along with the minimum amount of time students should spend preparing for class

○ Establish and communicate systematic learning milestones

Note. A complete listing of faculty requirements, principles, and best practices is available through the Center for Research on Adult Learning at CMU, http://www.cel.cmich.edu/cral/

As a final step, the Task Force distributed the draft, along with a request for comments, to engage a university-wide discussion of content. The document draft was distributed to academic program councils, department chairs, the Chair of the Academic Senate, and focus group participants. This effort led to valuable suggestions that were later integrated into the final draft of "Maximizing Learning."

Phase III: Implementation

Presently, CEL's Faculty Project is moving into its next phase: implementation of the "Maximizing Learning" document. The goal is to better align CEL's expectations of its off-campus faculty with its ability to accurately assess and support faculty needs. Consequently, members of the Faculty Project Task Force and CRAL are working in concert to create a teaching/learning assessment battery focused on best practices in adult learning. This assessment battery will offer multiple measures of faculty performance from several key perspectives: self, students, peers, and mentors. It will leverage results toward a more individually flexible system of faculty coaching and mentoring. In a related effort, "Maximizing Learning" was used to derive a set of academic expectations for CEL's adult learners, summarized in "Maximize Your Learning."

As noted previously, to drive the utilization of practices for maximizing adult learning, the College of Extended Learning is carefully reviewing its processes for faculty recruitment, selection, and development. For example, a state-of-the-art Faculty Credentials Evaluation will help select those applicants for an instructor position who have demonstrated the following competencies: ability to teach working adults, expert knowledge of course content, research and field experience. After a new faculty member receives an approval to teach a CMU class, he or she needs to be given appropriate guidance and training. CMU's faculty mentors provide ongoing faculty support and coaching in addition to the regular orientation and training sessions for off-campus faculty. Plans are being made for adopting "Maximizing Learning" as a primary resource used by the developers of faculty orientation and training sessions.

Conclusions

"Maximizing Learning" is more than a committee document; it is a conduit for the sharing of academic standards, performance objectives, and best practice techniques among off-campus faculty and their on-campus colleagues.[1] Having earned the support of CMU's President, College Dean, and Academic Program Councils, "Maximizing Learning" is now a living document, capable of concentrating finite resources where they can have their greatest effect–driving utilization of best teaching practices that directly benefit adult learners. These efforts are only the first step toward a broader focus on quality, accountability, and support for an essential component of external degree programs–off-campus faculty.

CMU's initiative can serve as a working template for the assessment, analysis, and quality enhancement of existing faculty systems. The process and practice behind CMU's initiative provides an opportunity to effect similar quality improvements at other institutions.

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Note

1. To request a copy of the full document, "Maximizing Learning," please contact Dr. Lana Ivanitskaya, CRAL, College of Extended Learning, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859, or email cral@cmich.edu.

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Mentoring the Adult Learner in Distance Education

Hilda R. Glazer
David S. Stein

Retention of adult learners in the distance doctoral, teaching, and learning environment is an issue of concern to faculty and administrators alike. The improvement of retention rates is critical during this time of decreasing enrollment in both campus and virtual graduate programs. Retention efforts focus on the beginning students as they orient to on-line learning and distance education and adjust to independent learning.

Using the doctoral programs at Walden University as the model for this discussion, retention has been an area in which effort has been focused during the past two years. Incoming students are typically supported by an orientation or start-up team and specially selected mentors to guide them through the first year. Often, progress is closely monitored in terms of benchmarks to be completed during the beginning quarters. Learners are motivated by the elation of beginning the program of study. The advanced students have the support of dissertation committees and are motivated by being able to see an end to their program of study. It is the students between these two groups who are of particular concern in this presentation: these are the students in academic mid-life. While most students who drop out from the Walden doctoral program do so during the first 12 months, approximately 20 percent of those who drop out will do so during the second year of enrollment. There is a curious increase in the dropout rate for all programs during the sixth quarter in the program.

Academic midlife is a stage between the completion of first-year tasks and the acceptance of a proposal. It is during this stage that students are typically more isolated from faculty due to the fact that they tend not to maintain frequent contact with the mentor, but rather work with individual faculty members for shorter periods of time. These students also tend to have completed residency requirements and as a result have less face-to-face contact with the university community. The excitement of an academic program becomes tempered with the requirements of family and job, and learners may become bogged down with the press of academic requirements and the search for a dissertation topic.

Academic and social integration is critical to persistence and degree completion; that is, the student feels part of the community (Towles, Ellis, and Spencer, 1993). Faculty-student contact has been identified as a variable impacting persistence in campus-based programs as well as distance education. Most of the research in this area has focused on undergraduate education and situations in which students chose one course using a distance format. However, the results of these studies can lead to the identification of variables for investigation of student factors in persistence in any distance education program. Research results with undergraduates have been inconsistent with regard to faculty-initiated contact, though trends indicate that faculty-initiated contact had a greater impact on completion with lower classes (Towles, Ellis, and Spencer, 1993). In a study by Pugliese (1994), none of the variables predicted to be associated with withdrawal from telecourses were found to predictive: these included locus of control, loneliness, social confirmation, social experience, and dyadic communication with faculty and tutors. In looking at systems to enhance the learning experience for the distance learner, research by Dillon, Gunawardena, and Parker (1992) supported the need for access to student services on-line and the importance of effective interpersonal communications between faculty and students. The results of this study suggested that teachers should be encouraged to assume a more active role in communications. Consistently, access to faculty, other support systems, and integration within the learning community have been identified as critical to success.

The objective of the present study was to identify from narratives of faculty and students how the student maintains a high level of integration in the distance academic community. What level of academic support is desired, and what level did the students receive during this period?

The Virtual Campus

One of the debates about the Internet has been whether it leads to more and better social relationships or if people become more isolated and cut off from genuine social relationships (Kraut et al., 1998). While the Kraut et al. study did not focus on educational outcomes, it did support the hypothesis that time on the Internet adversely affects social involvement and psychological well-being. An early study of German distance education by Kahl and Cropley (1986) identified a set of characteristics of distance learners: they often elect to work with a set plan, set aside special times for learning, and set up a learning area for themselves; they prefer learning materials that are clear, explicit, and structured.

The question for the midlife learner whose primary relationship with other learners and with faculty mentors is through the Internet is how to enhance the quality of those relationships so that they enhance the educational experience rather than adding to isolation and decreased social involvement.

This presentation explores and describes the strategies developed by faculty and students to provide academic support for the midlife student. The researchers used a variety of data collection techniques: online student interviews in the form of narratives, on-line faculty discussion over a three-week period, and an online focus group with student volunteers. The data were subjected to qualitative analysis techniques to identify patterns, themes, and trends regarding the interaction of faculty and students during this critical period.

A Developmental Perspective

Peck (cited in Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 1998) identified four psychological adaptations necessary in middle adulthood. They are valuing wisdom rather than valuing physical prowess, socializing as the primary value in relationships, emotional flexibility, and mental flexibility. Perhaps the one that is critical to this discussion is socializing as a primary value in relationships. Developing and maintaining a relationship with the mentor and with others in the graduate school cohort cannot be discounted. The mentoring relationship may hold the key to successful transition in graduate school and the successful adjustments to be made not only within the Walden community but also in the wider community both during and after the program.

The developmental literature can provide a perspective for looking at the midlife learner. Education is seen as being related to the development of identity in adult women. Petersen (2000) found that, for Caucasian women, education was a way to discover competence and to modify or transform established roles. Their goals and motivators appeared to revolve around personal emotional gains. For the African-American women in this study, barriers to education and opposition were the typical experiences in higher education rather than experiences that enhanced self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem and identity development can provide motivators for midlife women if barriers to success can be reduced or eliminated. Helson (1993) found in her study of Mills College graduates that, in contrast to previous research, women do not become less dependent over time when they have followed the " feminine social clock." Rather, it was the influence of multiple roles and tasks that women select: that is, it is critical to study subjects, both men and women, in life contexts. Thus the context in which graduate study occurs is the critical piece.

The development of goals is also related to success as a learner. Gollwitzer (1999) suggests that goal attainment is more likely when people frame their good intentions as learning goals rather than performance goals. Success depends on being successful at self-regulation; that is, being able to initiate goal-directed behavior and bringing it to a successful conclusion. Part of this is control of the environment; "the person prevents the derailing of an ongoing goal pursuit by removing the competing temptations from the situation in which the goal pursuit is to occur" (Gollwitzer, 1999, p. 494). Successful goal pursuit requires tenacity and flexibility (Gollwitzer, 1999). This is particularly important for the individual working independently and often without the visual and real support of others doing the same thing.

The relationship between the learner and faculty mentor has been seen by Walden as a critical part of the learning process. Defining that role and relationship for the midlife student is one of the focuses of this study. What are the characteristics of the successful mentoring relationship during this stage of academic life? Walden University works to develop opportunities for students and faculty to maintain contact with the academic community. This task is more difficult to achieve in the virtual environment. Innovative uses of student listservs and bulletin boards, residency options, and academic support services available on-line and by phone are provided. Which ones are desired and needed by the midlife student becomes one of the questions addressed in this study.

Keegan (1998) proposes that the manner in which a distance education institution reintegrates the teaching act with the learning act influences learner retention and the quality of academic performance. This theory informs our study of academic midlife learners. Keegan's theory suggests that the student's retention is enhanced when academic support services are available that integrate the student into the academic community or provide the student with the feeling that he or she is a member of the academic community even though the student is at a distance. In distance education, learners often do not have access to immediate learner-to-instructor or instructor-to-learner feedback; reinforcement may be delayed; and peer and academic support can be lacking. Reintegrating the teaching act with the learning act reconstructs the interpersonal relationships that exist in the face-to-face classroom. Keegan hypothesizes that the separation of the teaching act and learning act is responsible for a weak integration of the student into the scholarly life of the institution.

This lack of integration may contribute to students' dropping out of the learning experience. Further, the separation of the teaching act and learning act is responsible for a weakness in interpersonal communication, leading to a lack of quality in the learning achieved. This study explores how reintegration of the teaching and learning acts can occur in a distance learning environment.

Method

☐ Subjects and the Learning Environment

The faculty and learners participating in this study are from Walden University. Walden offers doctoral programs in two formats. The first is the traditional course format that characterizes the programs in the Division of Psychology and all MS programs. Courses are offered in an on-line format and in a format that combines on-line instruction and face-to-face learning. The other doctoral programs in Management, Education, and Health and Human Services use an independent study format in which a learner works with an individual faculty member to develop a learning agreement based on knowledge-area modules. The product of the learning agreement is a three-part demonstration of learning over a well-defined area of knowledge.

The student sample consisted of 36 doctoral students; 19 were enrolled in the independent-study (KAM) program and 17 in the course-based program. Of these, 25 (69 percent) were female and 11 were male. Time in the program varied, with a mean time of 23.75 months. All subjects completed consent forms, which they mailed to the investigators.

☐ The Interview Questions

The interviews were conducted on-line. Questions were sent to the list of participants and participants could respond to the group or to the investigators privately if they preferred. One question was sent out every two days. The questions were:

1. What did your mentor or other faculty members (without using names) do, say, or provide that kept you feeling part of the Walden community?
2. How did your mentor or other faculty members keep you progressing in your program?
3. What did you do to keep yourself focused on your studies, given the demands of your life?
4. In what ways did you keep yourself part of or identified with the Walden community of scholars?

As needed, the investigators sent follow-up questions requesting clarification or additional information.

Thematic Analysis and Code Development

Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information using themes generated inductively from the raw information. The specific procedure used was developed by Boyatzis (1998).

Theme 1. Responsiveness to learners

Definition: Faculty respond to queries or concerns in a timely manner (24–48 hrs).

Indicators: Answered my question promptly; always available when I called.

Theme 2: **Relationship with learners**

A. Supporting

Definition: Faculty offer reassurance indicating that one can succeed in the program.

Indicators: Tells students that "We are in this together"; keeps in regular contact to offer support and encouragement; expresses sincere interest in my success.

B. Academic progress

Definition: Consistent contact with the learners to ensure that progress in completing courses/KAMS is occurring; provides information on learning resources.

Indicators: Keeps in touch regularly to check on progress; responds in class postings (individually); provides advice on sequencing courses.

C. Respectful

Definition: Faculty reduces distance in status and treats students as adults.

Indicators: Faculty have been courteous, interested, cooperative with students; makes me feel like a valued and competent part of the community; meets me face to face to read a paper.

Theme 3: **Resources**

Definition: Links learners to a community of other learners or faculty.

Indicators: Initiated a listserv for contact with other students; connected "newbies" with experienced students.

Discussion

Analysis of the student and faculty narratives indicate that frequent meaningful communication seems to be the key to retention. Communication appears to be a metaphor for caring about the individual; the perception that one is cared about makes the difference. Being responsive is an important element of this. A second theme is the importance of knowledge of the program mechanics and how to work through it and knowing that the mentor is able to help the learner through the bureaucracy. It appears that the mentor and learner through the quality of the interaction are trying to simulate face-to-face interaction in the virtual environment. The third theme is that now is the time that the mentor begins to stress academic values as a way of integrating students into the academic community, as opposed to the initial focus on content.

One theoretical perspective that may account for this is the cognitive-experiential self-theory of Epstein (1993). The way in which people approach the world is through an experiential system, a rational system, and a primary process system. The experiential system is context-specific, and judgments about actions are based on past experience. The rational system brings to bear contextually generated general principles. These decisions are done within a context of meeting needs for relatedness, self-esteem, and coherence. Thus, if we decrease the relatedness and increase the isolation of the individual, decision making becomes more and more based on previous experience and may be unable to take into account the contextual differences related to distance learning.

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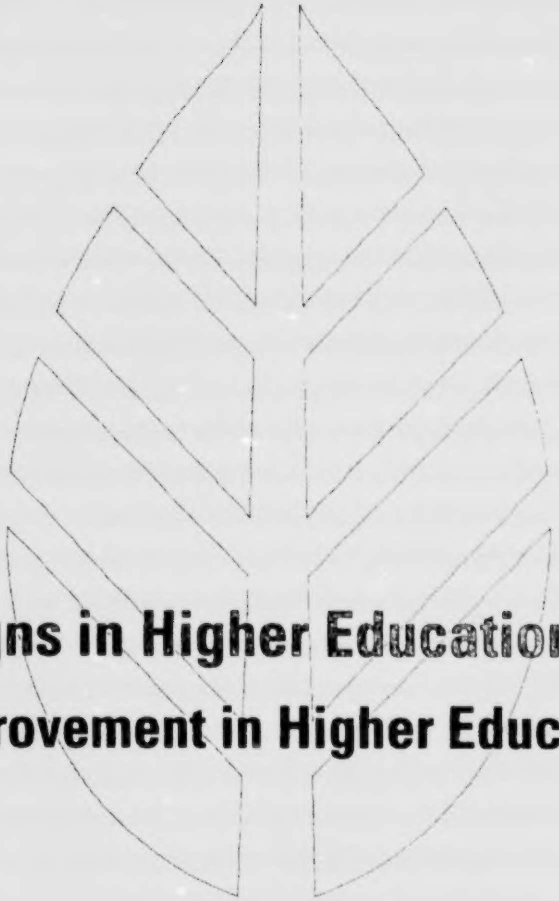

Chapter 8

New Designs in Higher Education

Quality Improvement in Higher Education

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

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New Designs in Higher Education"**

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Preparing Your Organization for AQIP

Jane A. Bishop
Dennis Ladwig
Michael Lanser

Introduction

Lakeshore Technical College (LTC), one of Wisconsin's sixteen technical colleges and part of the Wisconsin Technical College System, operates under a shared governance concept with the state and local boards equally responsible for setting and administering policies. The college offers associate degree and technical diploma programs, and adult and continuing education courses. LTC received its ten-year NCA accreditation in 1992. After the accreditation process, a plan for assessing student academic achievement was developed and committees were organized to carry it out. Although a plan was developed, efforts to implement it were fragmented and overall unsuccessful. The ability to measure outcomes was an important factor in determining if LTC was meeting its customers' needs. Demonstrating the ability to measure outcomes was the critical question in determining whether the college was ready to join AQIP. This paper discusses the journey Lakeshore Technical College (LTC) took to prepare for entering the AQIP process.

Developing a System to Identify and Monitor Results

The Student Academic Achievement Task Force was formed in 1993. The purpose of the task force was to develop a model to measure the accomplishments of students' goals. The group identified the focus for initial assessment efforts. Occupational competency programs were identified as the most critical for data collection and analysis to improve educational programs and services. In addition, eleven critical student achievement assessment elements were identified including: (1) quality employer satisfaction, (2) quality student satisfaction, (3) quality student support services, (4) quality articulation, (5) quality instruction, (6) quality staff, (7) quality environment, (8) quality evaluation by students, (9) quality facilities and equipment, (10) quality career exploration, and (11) quality student life. Three items were selected—quality of instruction, quality of staff, and quality of employer satisfaction. After achieving its first purpose of developing a model, a second purpose was drafted. The new purpose of the task force was to develop a road map for use of measurement techniques for each element in the initial phases of instruction, staff, and employer satisfaction with occupational programs. The task force analyzed and prioritized North Central input and identified training needs to use systems and processes to implement the model.

At the same time LTC was developing this model, the Wisconsin Technical College System was developing a model for colleges in the system to guide their data collection and assessment efforts. The priority in implementing the model was identified to be those activities instrumental in student success. Seventeen Core Indicators of Institutional Effectiveness were developed through input received from focus groups, analysis of North Central Association guidelines, and federal legislation. The core indicators focused on four key areas of effectiveness—student academic achievement, employer satisfaction, organizational quality, and public perception and satisfaction. The seventeen core indicators are (1) identification of student needs, goals ,and interests; (2) identification of student functional skills at entry; (3) course completion; (4) student grades; (5) student satisfaction with courses, programs, and services; (6) student retention/withdrawal rates; (7) student completion and graduation rates; (8) student achievement of educational goals; (9) student knowledge and skills at exit; (10) pass rates/scores of licensure exams; (11) placement rates/employment success; (12) employer satisfaction with graduates' work skills/performance; (13) achievement of institutional goals and standards; (14) organizational climate; (15) articulation and linkages with external organizations; (16) identification of customer needs and expectations; and (17) public satisfaction. The WTCS model was intended to provide a means to measure the performance of the entire state system.

As part of the creation of the core indicators, a survey was developed to identify what was currently being done at the college, who was responsible, and the status of the effort. Additionally, staff were asked about the future direction of assessment in their areas, the timelines, and the people responsible. Plans from two other national colleges were reviewed and served as initial benchmarks. Based on the evaluation of the plans and the survey results, an implementation plan was developed. The following activities were identified: (1) establish a framework for measuring institutional effectiveness, (2) form a steering committee, (3) allocate resources, (4) set priorities for assessment, (5) develop assessment measures according to priorities, and (6) establish data/information collection standards.

In 1996, the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Steering Committee was formed. The steering committee had representation from all areas of the college, and it provided leadership for determining measures for the core indicators in the WTCS Institutional Effectiveness Model. A faculty member was appointed chair, which assured faculty involvement and buy-in. For the next year, the committee worked on developing definitions and measurement parameters for each of the indicators. An annual "IE Core Indicator Status Report" was produced. It provided the LTC staff with (1) the seventeen measures, (2) the measures' definitions, (3) the person(s) responsible for gathering/reporting the data, (4) how/when the indicator was measured, (5) how/when the information was reported, (6) the data source/report name and statement of the target, (7) how the target was determined, (8) the interpretation as to how close LTC was to meeting the target, (9) update on findings for the core indicator from the previous year, (10) the current year opportunities for improvement, (11) statewide benchmarks/recommendations, and (12) miscellaneous information.

Accompanying the "IE Core Indicator Status Report" was the "Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Report." Initiated in 1997, this report showed the actual results for each indicator, the comparison results to the previous year, the comparisons to the benchmarks, and the findings/conclusions. This report was also published annually and distributed to all service areas.

Measurement using the IE Core Indicators began during the 1995–96 school year. One indicator was used. In 1996–97, eleven of the seventeen indicators were used as measures. All seventeen indicators have been used since 1997–98 and continue to be used today. As the measurements are accomplished, the Institutional Effectiveness Core Indicator Report Card is updated to reflect the current status. The report card is found on LTC's intranet and is distributed to all staff and the district board. Please refer to Figure 1 for the current LTC Report Card.

Selling the AQIP/Baldrige Concept to the LTC Executive Committee, the District Board, and the Staff

In the fall of 1999, the chair of the IE Steering Committee proposed to the LTC Executive Committee that the college pursue the Malcolm Baldrige/AQIP categories for the next NCA accreditation that was slated for early 2002. Extensive study and research on the Malcolm Baldrige categories, the traditional NCA criteria, and the Core Indicators of Institutional Effectiveness took place. It was critical for the measures LTC was using to match what was needed for the Baldrige/AQIP processes. Please refer to Figure 2 for comparison of the Core Indicators and the traditional NCA criteria and to Figure 3 for comparison between the Core Indicators and the AQIP categories.

In addition, the 1999–2000 strategic plan had identified the measurement of outcomes as one of its priorities. The core indicators of student satisfaction with courses, programs, and services; student retention/withdrawal rates; employer satisfaction with graduates' work skills/performance; and achievement of institutional goals and standards were the accountability measures in the strategic plan.

The initial reaction of the Executive Committee was uncertainty. They were familiar with the traditional approach and were not confident that the college had enough data or the systems and processes in place. In order to assist the Executive Committee in making the decision to employ the AQIP categories, the Research Department conducted an analysis comparing AQIP measures to the college's institutional effectiveness measures. Although it was not a one-to-one relationship, there was a strong correlation between the measures. On the basis of the discussion and demonstration of the evidence, the Executive Committee agreed to use the AQIP process of accreditation. Presentations contrasting the Baldrige/AQIP criteria and the traditional NCA criteria were delivered to the District Board and the entire LTC staff.

Integrating AQIP into the College's Strategic Planning Process

In the spring of 2000, the college's strategic planning process was redesigned, and a continuous improvement timeline aligned with the AQIP process was developed. The process consists of assessment, priorities, and strategies. Five-year performance measures for each strategy were developed, and targets were identified. The Core Indicators of Institutional Effectiveness serve as the skeleton for the measures. Discussion in planning meetings now revolves around how to measure progress.

Writing an Application for the Wisconsin Forward Award

As part of the criteria for AQIP membership, each college needs to obtain external feedback on quality criteria. LTC decided to use the Wisconsin Forward Award, Wisconsin's version of the Malcolm Baldrige criteria as its external validator. The application was submitted in June 2000. The preliminary materials gathered for assisting the Executive Committee in their decision about AQIP served as the basis of the application. The Institutional Effectiveness Core Indicators provided most of the results. In October, the college was informed that it had won the Mastery level of the Wisconsin Forward Award, indicating that LTC had developed and implemented effective and systematic approaches to many of the key requirements.

Using Feedback for Prioritizing Areas for Improvement

The "Wisconsin Forward Award Feedback Report" indicated that continued measurement needed to occur in order for positive trends to be illustrated over time. The report also indicated that although the college had identified and developed key strategic objectives and priorities, it had not developed specific timetables and evaluation methods to assess meeting the objectives. Since the heart of what the college does is identified in its strategic plan, continuing to monitor/measure progress in order to continuously improve the college and student learning is the next critical step in the AQIP process for the college.

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Figure 1. Lakeshore Technical College Institutional Effectiveness Core Indicator Report Card

	Core Indicator	Measure	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00	2004–05 Target
Student Achievement & Satisfaction								
1	Student Needs, Goals & Interests	% Earn an Associate Degree or Technical Diploma (Aid Codes 10 & 31)	NA	67.70%	59.10%	58.60%	65.60%	70%
2	Student Functional Skills at Entry	% of Students Needing Skill Enhancement	NA	13.10%	15.20%	8.20%	NA	10%
3	Course Completion	% of Students with A, B, C, or P	NA	82.00%	82.00%	81.80%	80.30%	85%
4	Student Grades	Overall Average GPA (School) (Maximum is 4.00)	NA	2.96	3.04	3.07	3.12	3.1
5	*Student Satisfaction	Satisfaction with LTC in General (A score of 5 is maximum.)	NA	4.12	4.22	4.19	4.24	4.3
6	*Student Retention	% of Program Students Re-enrolling Following Semester	NA	NA	67.00%	56.00%	61.40%	75%
7	Student Completion Rate	Average # of Years Attending the College	NA	1.72	2.24	2.04	2.19	2
7	Student Graduation Rate	% of Students Enrolled in Program Actually Graduating	NA	NA	48.93%	51.64%	NA	60%
8	Student Achievement of Ed. Goals	% Realizing Goal	NA	NA	83.40%	79.10%	88.30%	85.00%
9	Student Knowledge & Skills at Exit	Overall College Contribution to Improvement in Skills (Maximum score is 5.00)	NA	NA	3.72	3.77	3.79	4
10	Pass Rates/Scores of Licensure Exams	% Students Passing Certification Exams	NA	NA	91.38%	84.20%	NA	95%
11	Placement Rates	% Graduates Employed in Job-Related Field	71.20%	83.20%	81.60%	75.30%	84.20%	90%
Employer Satisfaction								
12	*Employer Satisfaction with LTC Graduates	Employer Satisfaction with LTC Graduates (Maximum score is 4.00)	NA	NA	3.51	NA	3.47	3.75
Organizational Quality								
13	*Achievement of Institutional Goals & Standards	% of Active Programs Meeting all 3 PVA Criteria	NA	64.70%	67.60%	50.00%	NA	75%
14	Organizational Climate	Overall Internal Climate (Maximum score is 5.0)	3.41	NA	3.57	NA	3.74	3.8
Public Perception & Quality								
15	Articulation and Linkages	# of Agreements with District High Schools	95	116	115	166	NA	350
16	Identification of Customer and Expectations	LTC is the institution I would attend for courses	NA	NA	NA	45.00%	48%	55%
17	Public Satisfaction	LTC is the best overall college.	NA	NA	NA	42.60%	44.00%	50%

* indicates Accountability Measures

Figure 2.
Lakeshore Technical College
Comparison of the Institutional Effectiveness Core Indicators and Traditional NCA Criteria

NCA Criteria/ Core Indicators	Criterion I Mission	Criterion II Systems	Criterion III Assessment	Criterion IV Planning	Criterion V Integrity
Identification of Student Needs, Goals & Interests (1)			•		
Identification of Student Functional Skills at Entry (2)			•		
Course Completion (3)			•		
Student Grades (4)			•		
Student Satisfaction with Courses, Programs & Services (5)		•	•	•	
Student Retention/Withdrawal Rates (6)			•		
Student Completion & Graduation Rates (7)			•	•	
Student Achievement of Educational Goal(s) (8)			•		
Student Knowledge & Skills at Exit (9)			•	•	
Pass Rates/Scores on Licensure Exams (10)			•		
Placement Rates/Employment Success (11)			•	•	
Employer Satisfaction with Graduates' Work Skills/Performance (12)			•	•	•
Achievement of Institutional Goals & Standards (13)	•	•		•	•
Organizational Climate (14)	•	•		•	
Articulation & Linkages with External Organizations (15)		•	•	•	
Identification of Customer Needs & Expectations (16)	•		•	•	•
Public Satisfaction (17)	•	•	•		

Figure 3. Lakeshore Technical College Comparison of the Institutional Effectiveness Core Indicators with the AQIP Criteria

AQIP Criteria/Core Indicators	Leading and Communicating	Planning	Student and Stakeholder Focus	Measuring Effectiveness	Valuing People	Supporting Institutional Operations	Building Collaborative Relationships	Helping Students Learn	Other Objectives
Identification of Student Needs, Goals & Interests (1)		•	•			•		•	
Identification of Student Functional Skills at Entry (2)		•	•			•		•	
Course Completion (3)		•		•		•		•	
Student Grades (4)		•	•	•		•		•	
Courses, Programs and Services (5)			•		•	•		•	
Student Retention/Withdrawal Rates (6)			•		•	•		•	
Rates (7)			•	•	•	•		•	
Student Achievement of Educational Goal(s) (8)		•	•	•	•			•	
Student Knowledge and Skills at Exit (9)		•	•	•	•		•	•	
Pass Rates/Scores on Licensure Exams (10)			•	•	•		•	•	
Placement Rates/ Employment Success (11)			•	•				•	
Employer Satisfaction with Graduates' Work Skills/Performance (12)		•	•	•		•	•	•	
Achievement of Institutional Goals & Standards (13)	•	•	•				•		
Organizational Climate (14)	•		•		•		•		•
Articulation & Linkages with External Organizations (15)	•		•			•	•		
Identification of Customer Needs and Expectations (16)	•	•	•			•	•		•
Public Satisfaction (17)	•		•						•

AQIP Quality Improvement Teams: How One Worked, Lessons from Others

Stanley Jensen
John Erwin

"How to ..." Just as Vital as "What to ..."

The concept that colleges and universities ought to constantly improve and that more than just a few people should be involved usually enjoys wide support. The challenge arises more from the "how to ..." than the "What to ..."

With the insight and the experience from personally building more than 300 continuous process improvement teams and forming more then three dozen steering committees, some lessons have been learned. The following principles outline some of the basic "how to's" of one successful way to effectively implement quality improvement.

Preparation for Quality Improvement

When setting the stage for quality improvement or continuous process improvement, it is vital that top leadership view this as a commitment that is continuous. It is not a flavor-of-the-month educational fad. Therefore, it is important to set firmly the foundation of support, including support by the president, vice presidents, deans, and the board. This full foundation of support may take some time to develop and usually needs clarification before there is sufficient support to assure a great start.

- **Key points of preparation**
  - Decide who is to facilitate the quality improvement training.
  - Meet with president and other champions of quality improvement—long-term commitment needs to be gained.
  - If the board is not included already, gain initial support.
  - Initial training of leadership and a cross-section of administration, faculty, and staff, usually for approximately two days. This training includes:
    - Foundation principles
    - Seven-step process improvement model
    - Introduction and use of quality tools
    - Integration with AQIP and NCA.

Establish a Quality Steering Committee

The quality steering committee is a horizontal representative slice of the entire institution. It needs to include the president and any leadership who will be needed to make decisions and support teams and their recommendations for improvement. The steering committee's role is to guide or steer the process of quality improvement.

The role of the steering committee:

- Guide the quality improvement process for the entire institution.
- Guide and support quality teams.
- Help choose team members.
- Steer teams into the strategic areas of most need or of most help to the institution.
- Coordinate improvement theory implementation.
- Guide strategic planning for the future of quality improvement.
- Coordinate the AQIP-NCA process.

Typical members of the steering committee:

- President
- Vice presidents
- Deans
- Directors
- Representative of faculty, staff, others areas.

Structure and Function of Teams

The use of teams is not the only way to implement quality improvement, but teams are one of the main ways to realize not only the constant improvement of processes, but also the involvement of many people in real change and in breaking down barriers between divisions.

Team size is more of a factor than most may think. Smaller teams seem to work more effectively and efficiently. Teams of four to six members tie up less time and energy and aid in the ever-difficult scheduling battle. The small team can still tap many other minds in the institution without requiring their presence on the team.

- **The typical structure of teams**
  - Four to six members
  - A team leader chosen by the team to help coordinate and organize the team's efforts; in addition, the leader stays in communication with the steering committee
  - A team scribe chosen by the team to keep notes and aid in organizing the team's efforts
  - The team sponsor, a member of the steering committee whose role is to help the team achieve success and to act as the communication link between the steering committee and the team

The steering committee chooses strategic processes or areas that are in the most need of improvement or are of the most importance to the institution. The steering committee then chooses team members who are logical as part of the individual teams. The team is given a general time line and a date to report back to the steering committee. The steering committee coordinates the recognition of the teams and their successes.

Typical Function of Teams

The team will typically meet regularly. Some meet each week, some every two weeks, and some once a month. The key is to have strong and clear facilitation of the team meeting and great training.

Teams will learn:

- The philosophy of continuous improvement
- The six principles of continuous improvement

- A seven-step approach to continuous improvement
- About 30 tools of continuous improvement
- Focus on understanding students' and other stakeholders' needs
- How to measure effectiveness
- How to effectively value team members and others throughout the organization
- How to improve processes and how to implement those ideas in cost-effective ways
- How to optimize the whole institution, not just parts of the institution.

Measurement and Communication of Outcomes

If great things happen as a result the continuous process improvement effort, but no one attributes them to the effort, the building of momentum will be blunted. Clear measures of results will be needed for a number of reasons:

- To clearly measure the effectiveness of the theory for improvement
- To use for charting the course for further improvements
- To clearly identify gains that can be celebrated and recognized throughout the whole institution
- To connect to the implementation of the AQIP model and NCA accreditation
- To gain even more support for continuous process improvement.

Communication of the outcomes and the specific measures is not to be taken for granted. They need to be communicated in nearly every way possible. Educators and students alike are constantly bombarded by thousand of messages each week. It is easy to miss even important communications. So something much more than a memo or an e-message is needed. This communication needs to become a part of the very fabric of the institution and the board.

Summary

The concepts of continuous process improvement or quality are great, and they work effectively in education. But the implementation of the concept is not easy and should be approached with care and insight. It is hoped that the experiences at Cincinnati State and three other colleges that have aided in the preparation of this approach will lend some ideas and guidance to other colleges and universities as they embark on the uses of quality and the AQIP/NCA model for institutional improvement.

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From Rhetoric to Results: One Department's Initial Experiences with AQIP

William E. Roweton

The North Central Association's (NCA) Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP, 2000) revitalizes postsecondary institutional program assessments (López, 2000). Empirically, AQIP assesses patterns in postsecondary student learning with contemporary data-analytic and design strategies. At least historically, AQIP demands much from postsecondary educators.

Through AQIP, a college's initial NCA program assessment plan transforms itself, for example, (1) *by utilizing direct measures of student learning;* (2) *by incorporating assessment results into instructional decision-making;* and (3) *by developing psychometrically.* In this program, challenges of evaluating student learning and of implementing AQIP in a small, rural Midwestern college will be explored.

Implementing AQIP

Effective program assessments of student learning, especially their quantitative designs and statistical treatments, rarely walk off-the-shelf. Through trial and error, productive strategies cobble themselves together creatively from professional experience, skill, and persistence. Moreover, with AQIP, data drive instructional decision-making; assessments plans respond to measures of their own effectiveness; and student learning is assessed directly.

Utilizing Direct Measures of Student Learning

> *The focus of AQIP…is student learning.* (AQIP, 2000, p. 4)

Direct measures of student learning refer to assessments of what students do. With some postsecondary program assessments, for example, measures of student performance occur before and after instruction, e.g., basic interrupted time series design (Orwin, 1997; Spector, 1981). Student performance, that is, measures of learning, improves following instruction. Often, data interpretation amounts to statistically linking key instructional variables, such as instructional style, to levels of performance change. Understanding relationships between input and instructional variables sometimes yield instructional-planning insights.

Success with AQIP may depend on productively coordinating (1) measures of student learning and (2) effective interpretive tools rendering results useful for instructional planning. The task is rarely simple.

Student learning reflects numerous input, idiosyncratic, and situational factors, only some of which accommodate instructional planning. Determining which variables enjoy both social and statistical significance and enrich instructional planning compels some (e.g., Astin, 1993/1991; House, 2000) to champion multivariate approaches to program assessment.

"If reality is complex," Hubert Blalock (1970, p. 71) observes, "so must be the analysis!"

Incorporating Assessment Results

> How do you use information about your … performance … to improve your [instructional] approach [to student learning]? How does your institution learn to improve continuously from your experience with these processes? (AQIP, 2000, p. 10)

Effective program assessments for AQIP reflect more than valid educational visions shared professionally, or just psychometric sophistication (e.g., Braskamp, 1991; Stake, 1967), or merely cognitive and instructional research. Program assessments are valued because they can enhance educational planning.

However, capturing decision data from natural learning environments challenges our design and statistical skills and our interpretive imagination. Furthermore, connecting program assessment data to instructional planning decisions remains poorly mapped. Nonetheless, strategies for linking assessment results to decisions will be discussed.

Developing Psychometrically

> …an institution will articulate its goals with measurable precision so that its performance in achieving them can be consciously tracked. (AQIP, 2000, p. 4)

Healthy program assessments grow and prosper, that is, evolve. Productive ones confront, resolve, and, ultimately, discount initial empirical queries advantageously. That's growth.

When an institution's assessment plan does not learn from its own experience, refurbish it technically. Criteria for evaluating growth in technical aspects of program assessment will be discussed.

Conclusion

Together, valued and testable educational hypotheses about human learning, realistic methods of data management, sufficiently complex program evaluation designs, and professional motivation promise improved postsecondary program assessments of student learning. To do so as AQIP recommends, (1) utilize direct measures of student learning, (2) incorporate assessment results into planning, and (3) develop program assessments psychometrically.

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Charting Our Course to Academic Quality Improvement... The Western Way

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Introduction

Western Wisconsin Technical College (Western) has charted a course to academic quality improvement by integrating its continuous quality improvement initiatives and its preparation for North Central Association (NCA) reaccreditation. Western's participation in NCA's Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) has provided unique opportunities for the college to enhance its ongoing quality initiative by identifying key areas for improvement. Additionally, the AQIP process is enabling the college to use its resources and its energy to focus on improvement instead of focusing on preparation for an NCA site visit. This paper will provide practical information for other colleges that be considering AQIP as an alternative form of reaccreditation.

Western's continuous quality improvement program embraces the core values and concepts set forth in the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program. The college believes that these values and concepts are embedded beliefs and behaviors found in high-performing organizations. They include the following:

- Visionary leadership
- Customer-driven excellence
- Organizational and personal learning
- Valuing employees and partners
- Agility
- Focus on the future
- Managing for innovation
- Management by fact
- Public responsibility and citizenship
- Focus on results and creating value
- Systems perspective

These values and concepts are central to Western's mission, vision, values, beliefs, and strategic priorities. They form the framework for the selection of what the college considers to be critical elements that define the Western Way: collaboration, communication, caring, and commitment.

This paper will describe these critical elements and will provide examples of how they help the college Chart our Course to Academic Quality Improvement. Areas to be addressed include:

- Building strong linkages with other higher education institutions
- Focusing strategic planning efforts
- Identifying comparable performance measures and benchmarking
- Strengthening commitment to students, key stakeholders, and staff
- Enhancing a key college value of working together in a healthy environment where creativity, humor, and fun are encouraged.

Building Strong Linkages with Other Higher Education Institutions

Western believes that strong linkages with other higher education institutions foster a spirit of collaboration and cooperation and provide opportunities for networking, communicating, and learning. These linkages with other two-year colleges as well as with four-year universities help the college stay current and at the forefront of educational change initiatives. Western fosters its linkages by its active involvement in a variety of consortia.

Each of these consortia serves a different purpose and allows for a wide range of involvement by a large number of college administrators, faculty, and staff. One of the college's "Vital Few" identified as part of the AQIP process is Valuing People. Providing opportunities for all staff members to participate in college-wide teams is one of the ways Western integrates its continuous quality improvement philosophy throughout the college. A unique aspect of team involvement at Western is the active participation of District Board members on many college teams. This participation provides Board members with the opportunity to work side-by-side with college staff, thereby enhancing communication between the District Board and college employees.

Western was one of the first colleges to be accepted into NCA's Collaborative Quality Colloquia. This Colloquia joined Western with four other colleges: Eastern Iowa Community College, Lakeshore Technical College, Southern Illinois University, and Fort Hayes State College. Our common bond with the other consortia members is our interest in using the AQIP process as an alternative reaccreditation format and in collaborating with each other in the areas of benchmarking and data analysis. We have met one time since the NCA meeting and continue to communicate via a listserve and individual contacts with members of the other colleges.

Another linkage Western has found to be beneficial is the AQIP Strategy Forum that brought together six different institutions in November 2000. Western was linked with Alexandria Technical College, Terra Community College, Eastern Iowa Community College, Capella University, and New Mexico State University for a three-day forum in which we learned more about the AQIP process and each other. We participated in activities designed to help us focus our continuous improvement efforts on three to four "Vital Few" priorities that we will measure, track, and report to NCA over the next three years. The collaborative spirit of the forum helped affirm the college's quality journey and has resulted in follow-up meetings and communication with several partners.

A local higher education linkage in which Western has been actively involved over the past five years is the La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium (HSC)—a partnership among the three higher education institutions in La Crosse and the two major medical centers. The HSC is a national model of collaboration and cooperation and is meeting both the educational and health care needs of the Coulee Region. The HSC has fostered interest in developing more two-plus-two degree programs and in working together to meet both student and employer demands for health care workers.

Western is also a member of the Consortium for Community College Development, a program sponsored by the University of Michigan. Along with nine other two-year colleges, Western is participating in a year-long Strategic Thinking Forum. A team of college staff is attending four two-day meetings designed to help the college learn how to think strategically. Collaboration with other college teams fosters a spirit of creativity and community and provides college staff members with yet another opportunity to bring back ideas that will enhance the college's quality initiatives.

Most recently, Western has been accepted into the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN). This organization is a leader in the use of continuous quality improvement principles in higher education. CQIN brings together the presidents of the various member colleges twice a year for collaboration and strategic planning. Additionally, CQIN sponsors a summer institute for member institutions where teams of college staff members can learn how continuous quality improvement is used in the corporate world.

It is obvious that building strong linkages with other higher education institutions is one of the values in which Western strongly believes and that Western uses to help chart its course to academic quality improvement. Western believes that it can learn much from its colleagues and that the exchange of ideas, energy, and camaraderie all contribute positively to its quality initiatives.

Focusing Strategic Planning Efforts

One of the most significant ways in which Western has charted its course to academic quality improvement is to focus and align its strategic planning efforts. The college has refined and improved its planning process over the past several years, and during the past year has revised its mission, vision, value, and belief statements. After completing this process, the college sharpened its focus on what it is really about: enrollment, retention, and student learning. In other words, the college asks itself three questions: Do we get them? Do we keep them? Do they learn? By simplifying priorities and aligning them with these three key areas, the college has also focused its data collection and analysis processes.

Western's goal is to collect, analyze, track, and benchmark data in the areas of enrollment, retention, and student learning. Western believes that by prioritizing the data it collects, it will simplify its management information processes and will be able to report meaningful data results that can be used for continuous improvement purposes. Western is committed to establishing baseline data in these three key areas, to identifying comparable data sources with whom it can compare our results, and to establishing benchmark and best-in-class data for which it can set stretch targets.

Western has been tracking its enrollment data for several years and has an excellent system that follows student enrollment over a several-month period and compares enrollment figures with past semesters and years. These data have helped the college achieve its priority of attaining a stable enrollment even in times of high employment. Specific enrollment strategies have been implemented based on data analysis of past enrollment patterns. The next step is to seek comparative data with respect to enrollment patterns at similar institutions and to set benchmarks based on best-in-class practices.

One of the areas of focus for the 2000-01 academic year is to increase student retention. Retention data have been collected for years, but have not been organized into a format that can be used for decision-making. Currently, the college's Enrollment Team is working to develop a retention database similar to the one developed to track enrollment. These data will be used to track and trend retention at both the college and program levels. Specific retention strategies will then be developed by faculty to meet the needs of students in a variety of different programs. Benchmarks will be set based on retention data from consortia partners.

Collecting and analyzing data on student learning is another area of focus for the 2000-01 academic year. Preliminary data were collected on student achievement of technical program outcomes during spring 2000. These data will serve as baseline data for tracking student learning in each major. Additionally, preliminary data were collected on student achievement of college-wide learning outcomes during spring 2000. These data will also serve as baseline data for tracking student learning in the general education area. The college is currently investigating additional ways to measure student learning in both general education and in the major. In particular, standardized tests are being considered so that the college can have comparative data to benchmark student learning results and to set stretch targets.

Realistically, the collection and analysis of data in these three key areas will take considerable time, resources, and commitment. Western is determined to measure its effectiveness with respect to enrollment, retention, and student learning. It is only by determining baseline, comparative, and benchmark metrics that the college can continue to effectively chart a course to academic quality improvement.

Using Benchmarking as an Integral Component of Academic Quality Improvement

Strategic planning is used throughout higher education to address such issues as:

- Who are our potential customers?
- What changes are occurring within our marketplace, and how will we adapt?
- What are we doing to effectively meet the needs of our stakeholders?

Benchmarking can significantly impact the effectiveness of higher education by providing assistance in reaching those strategic goals. Benchmarking is the process of identifying and analyzing practices that produce desired results set forth by an organization. Benchmarking begs to ask the questions:

- How good are we (who says)?
- How good can we be (compared to whom)?
- How do we get better (who is the best)?

Benchmarking can take on several forms, including internal, competitive, and best-in-class. Internal benchmarking focuses primarily on in-house practices or processes within the college to achieve improvement. Progress can be consistently demonstrated over a period of time compared to a baseline. Often these improvements are process measures that ultimately affect outcome measures. Process measures are usually unique to specific segments of the college organization. Examples of internal benchmarking may be program retention, length of time to remedy a work order, or percent of direct high school enrollment.

Competitive benchmarking seeks to identify comparable measures with others. These comparable measures should equate "apples to apples." The measured data need to be commonly defined so the comparison is accurate. Often the organization compares itself to competitors, but competitive benchmarking may also occur internally by comparing like processes within the organization. Common examples of competitive benchmarking include length of admissions process, enrollment, and graduation rates.

Best-in-class benchmarking is a continuous, ongoing effort to discover the superior or leading practices of others. Often these processes are revealed as a result of competitive benchmarking. Best-in-class benchmarking requires the expansion of horizons, being conscious not to dismiss another college for "being too different from us"—why can't a two-year technical college model outstanding processes or practices on those of a four-year private college? It also entices colleges and universities to search outside higher education for stretch targets. Business, industry, and health care excel in processes similar to those used in higher education and can serve as a prototype for changing and improving the way a college or university does business.

As a result of the AQIP process, Western will set targets for improvement for next year and will project stretch targets for subsequent years. Western could set realistic, safe targets based on past performance but has decided instead to set stretch targets. This decision will most likely require modification of present processes and practices to achieve those goals, thereby enhancing and fostering the continuous improvement of key college processes. Participation in consortia such as the Collaborative Quality Colloquia, CQIN, and the Strategic Leadership Forum provides the networking needed to identify comparable and best-in-class data. Benchmarking will augment Western's Continuous Quality Improvement Initiative. Programs and service areas will establish internal benchmarking to monitor individual effectiveness, while competitive and best-in-class benchmarking will help establish Western as a leader in higher education. Western views benchmarking as an essential element of its academic quality improvement journey.

Strengthening Commitment to Students, Key Stakeholders, and Staff

When Western voluntarily elected to choose the AQIP process as an alternative format for NCA reaccreditation, it was vital to demonstrate to college staff the relationship between the AQIP process and its existing continuous quality improvement initiatives. It was especially important for college staff to understand how the seven Baldrige criteria align with the nine AQIP categories. The compelling question was, how does the college ask already over-worked employees to become involved in the process? By incorporating the AQIP process into the work of existing college teams and committees, Western has been able to garner substantial college-wide support for this new approach to reaccreditation. In particular, the prior commitment to student success and to measuring student learning aligned with the AQIP category—Helping Students Learn. There was a need to incorporate the process into the work of existing college committees.

Participation in the AQIP process required Western to select its "Vital Few"—those areas selected to track and measure over the next three years. Western chose four of the nine AQIP criteria as the major foci of its continuous quality improvement efforts for the next three years. Selecting the "Vital Few" was a collaborative effort by the Leadership and Strategic Planning committees at Western. It was imperative to align the "Vital Few" with the existing Strategic Priorities as shown in the following chart.

AQIP "Vital Few"		**Western's Strategic Priorities**
Helping Students Learn Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	Measuring Effectiveness	Maintain a stable enrollment by offering a comprehensive, cost-effective mix of programs and services that reflect the dynamic educational needs of the District
Helping Students Learn		Enhance Student Success
Helping Students Learn		Measure and Improve Student Learning
Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs		Increase Student Satisfaction
Valuing People		Increase Employee Satisfaction

The AQIP criteria Helping Students Learn and Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs relate to more than one strategic priority; Valuing People aligns with a single priority; and Measuring Effectiveness supports all the strategic priorities.

Choosing to link the AQIP "Vital Few" to the college's strategic priorities reinforced Western's beliefs and fostered buy-in and acceptance by faculty and staff. At Western it is believed that excellence is related to enrollment, retention, and student learning, or the mantra: "Do we get them? Do we keep them? Do they learn?" The readiness to share Western's "Vital Few" publicly demonstrates its long-term commitment to the process that in turn supports the institutional goals. Faculty and staff are less inclined to view NCA reaccreditation as additional work, but instead to view it as "real work" that validates the goals by striving to create an excellent product and environment for all students, employees, and community stakeholders.

Enhancing a Key College Value: Working Together In a Healthy Environment Where Creativity, Humor, and Fun Are Encouraged

Few conditions have a greater impact on an organization than internal conflict. Yet many leaders avoid focusing on conflict within their organizations, perhaps because it is one of the most difficult of all areas to address. Ironically, many leaders realize that the ability to effectively address conflict will enable the organization to respond to emerging challenges more than any other factor. One of Western's key values–working together in a healthy environment where creativity, humor, and fun are encouraged–plays a significant role in the college's ability to successfully chart its course to academic quality improvement.

It is true that human beings disagree; this is a normal condition in the workplace. It is especially true that human beings in a complex organization will disagree over issues that arise as part of a normal work environment. When that work environment also includes a collective bargaining unit, an additional element is added that can contribute complexity and confrontation. However, it is also a normal human condition to seek conflict resolution when disagreements arise. Successful organizations understand how to balance these seeming polarities.

One of the ways Western has been able to meet some of these challenges as they relate to creating a healthy work environment has been for organizational leaders to communicate this balanced vision as an expectation for the organization. Many leaders shy away from addressing the second element of the equation–resolving and managing conflict. By doing so, they inadvertently send the message to employees that any level of conflict is normal and expected. Western has consciously attempted to accept the fact that internal conflict is inevitable; yet, because one of Western's "Vital Few" is Valuing People, it is critical to also convey the message that conflict is manageable.

Some of the simple steps Western has taken to address the issue of internal conflict enforce one of the critical elements that define the Western Way: caring. Other organizations can follow some of these simple suggestions that help address internal conflict:

1. Leaders should clearly spell out in the organizational value statements that everyone shares the responsibility for conflict resolution. While it is not possible to completely eliminate conflict, organizations will expend far less energy in addressing problems if they are not passed along to someone else to solve.

2. Supervisors should receive training in conflict resolution techniques. Frequently, early intervention can clear up misunderstandings. Supervisors are most often in the position of recognizing conflict at the early stages and can effectively intervene.

3. Leaders should evaluate the system for rewards and recognition. Programs such as the "employee of the year" (though well-intended) can often produce negative side effects that outweigh the positives. Ironically, the individual performance that is recognized is often, in reality, the result of a team effort. For this reason, individual recognition often leads to resentment. In fact, many organizations have stopped using pay-for-performance incentives and even traditional performance appraisals for similar reasons. Internal competition, as a rule, is divisive. It is one of the reasons Western has abandoned all of its "employee of the year" awards. To be certain, each organization is unique. Consequently, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing rewards and recognition. Nonetheless, this is a key area in the effort to reduce internal conflict.

4. Leaders must walk the talk. When leaders find themselves drawn into conflict and appear to show bias within the organization, they can likely anticipate others to do much the same. That's just the way it works. Actions speak more loudly than words.

5. Finally, maintain a sense of humor and have fun. Encourage others within the organization to have fun as well. This can be the best medicine to reduce conflict and focus on a resolution.

Most leaders recognize the need to build flexibility into their organization. By building an expectation of cooperation, teamwork, conflict resolution, and fun into Western's value system, the college has also built in organizational flexibility. Flexibility leads to success and to an organization's ability to respond to a variety of situations with agility. Most importantly, Western's approach to conflict management is based on one of its primary values–caring for its employees.

Conclusion

Western has charted a course to academic quality improvement by integrating its continuous quality improvement initiatives and its preparation for North Central Association (NCA) reaccreditation. By aligning its ongoing continuous improvement activities with the AQIP process, Western has been able to simplify its processes and to focus its human and other resources more effectively. Central to the college's ability to respond to its customer needs while maintaining a constant, consistent focus on quality is its dedication to critical elements that define the Western Way: collaboration, communication, caring, and commitment.

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Show Up...Play Nice...Work Together: Preparing Students for the High Technology Workplace

Ray Turner
Toni Glasscoe

The STAR Institute in Lansing, Michigan, was launched in fall 1998 to address several needs:

- Business and industry in the Lansing Community College (LCC) service area needed a steady supply of workers with high technology skills.
- Area high schools were largely ill equipped to prepare students in several key high technology career paths and were looking for ways to provide their students with this option.
- Students, while ready to learn high technology skills, were woefully unprepared for actual participation in a contemporary workplace.

The STAR Institute was created by Lansing Community College to meet these needs. The college's partners include the Lansing Public Schools and a collection of local and regional businesses. Enrollment is open to any student in the college's service area, with the cost of enrollment paid by the student's home school district. Not all schools in the service area are willing to support their students' participation in STAR.

Students attend STAR Institute for half of the day and their home schools for the other half.

STAR Institute curricula mirror curricula on the main LCC campus, and students earn LCC credit for their STAR work. They have an LCC transcript that reflects coursework identical to the transcripts of traditional college-age students taking similar programs on the main campus. STAR classes vary from main campus classes in that students spend more time in each class, work in a cohort group for one to two years, and learn workplace skills along with the technical training of the curricula.

The Problem

Integrating the necessary technical training and the workplace skills training in ways that are effective and meaningful to high school students presents unique problems:

- High school students are high school students. Carrying six to nine college credits and three classes at their home school, and learning how to function in the workplace **and** make it to the prom on time is asking a lot from a 16-year-old. To accomplish our goals would require new approaches.
- Students and teachers alike are accustomed to the basic patterns of traditional classrooms, patterns that are not flexible, include burdensome redundancy that limits creative use of time, and have little built-in problem-solving potential.
- The traditional course structure and class schedule do not promote meaningful, integrated learning. They are designed to separate learning into digestible chunks. The STAR Institute needed to pull those chunks together, gain efficiency in using classroom time, and increase flexibility dramatically.

What We Tried

During the STAR's first year (1998-1999), it became clear that students were not going to learn workplace skills by adding a few "how to write your resumé" seminars and taking a few field trips. Initial attempts at using this approach met with dismal failure and significant student rebellion. We discovered that the students' home schools had already shut down the avenue of seminars and workshops by exposing their students to a series of very bad seminars and workshops that were not related either to their fields of study or their career plans. This realization led faculty, in consultation with students, to Project Based Learning.

Project Based Learning (PBL)

PBL is not a new concept, and it has a very good track record in many settings. Connecting PBL with the students' technical training, setting aside specific time for PBL work, and trying to create as much as possible real-world projects, PBL began to give students a sense of how to apply their technical skills to real-world problems and how to work together to plan and solve problems.

During the second year of PBL at STAR (1999-2000), it became clear that the workplace skills most lacking in students were communication skills. STAR Institute advisory councils reinforced this conclusion vigorously. For the current year (2000-2001), all STAR curricula were revised to include coursework in oral communication in the workplace and technical writing. Adjustments to technical course offerings were made, but the credit load was not diminished.

More Work—Still Only Twenty-Four Hours

STAR faculty and staff looked ahead to the expanded course requirements of 2000-2001, with genuine concerns about student workloads. Curricula required students to do more work in the same time. How could we ask them to do technical coursework, PBL, and now two additional communication courses and still make the program work for them?

We concluded that we needed to aggressively pursue three strategies: comprehensive integration of communication courses, technical courses, and PBL; a vigorous application of the use of the wide range of quality learning tools typified by those promoted by David Langford; and a thorough student orientation at the beginning of the year.

Integration of Communication and Technical Courses

Still in process, this strategy has had mixed results. The theory, of course, is to combine assignments or activities in two or more classes to accomplish multiple learning outcomes from the same effort and time. The close coordination between faculty needed to do this well is difficult to achieve. Finding the time, overcoming historic patterns, and scheduling learning units to coincide are all problems that STAR faculty and staff are struggling with to improve and increase the integration of coursework.

Quality Learning Tools

In June 2000, at the end of STAR's academic year, most faculty and staff attended a week-long seminar with David Langford. Langford's approach to using traditional quality tools in the classroom is proving to be a good fit for STAR faculty and students as they plan together and solve problems. The tools have provided a strong base for faculty to think and work together on integration problems. During the summer of 2000, many faculty used these tools to prepare for the third element of our improvement plan—a thorough student orientation at the beginning of fall semester. The STAR Institute presentation at this NCA Annual Meeting will focus on the use of these tools in the context of our work on technology and workplace skills.

STARGate—Getting Students Ready for the STAR Experience

STAR faculty and staff set aside two full weeks at the beginning of fall semester to orient students to the skills they would need and the expectations that come with STAR participation. This two-week session was highly structured and involved all STAR faculty and staff, most of whom were present for the entire orientation. Various faculty and staff led different portions of STARGate and generally had the assistance of several others for the application activities. Students learned about STAR systems, about STAR technology resources and how to use them, about Lansing Community College and its services, and about quality learning tools.

If STARGate were a research project, it would be one that came with a built-in control group. The relevant behavior and achievement of second-year students (who did **not** have this orientation in their first year) can be compared to that of first-year students (who have never participated in STAR **without** the orientation.) In preparation for next year, faculty and staff will be assessing STARGate as it plans for the next round of improvements.

Conclusion

Taken together, curriculum integration, broad application of quality learning tools and thorough orientation of students hold the promise of delivering higher quality learning. Addressing both a wide range of subjects and their effective application to the workplace must be accomplished for STAR students to be successful in our demanding program. The STAR faculty and staff, as they have for two-plus years now, continue to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of this experiment and refine it to improve their service to students.

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Choosing AQIP: To Be or Not To Be (a Participant)?

Terry Kuhn
Paul Gaston
Karen Budd

Kent State University, a doctoral/research-extensive institution, consists of a large, diverse residential campus and seven regional campuses. The Kent campus provides baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral study opportunities, while the Regional Campuses serve specific community needs with associate degree programs in more than twenty-four technical and business fields. The eight-campus system covers a geographic area the size of Connecticut. Kent State offers a full range of academic programs with supportive strengths in focused research and service areas.

The total enrollment of Kent State University reflects 6000 residential students and 26,000 commuter students who approach its campuses from nearby apartments and from cities including Akron, Cleveland, and Canton. More than 30,000 Kent State students are Ohio residents, and the remaining 2000 come from 46 states and 33 countries. There are 2600 adult students and about 1700 students transferred to Kent from other institutions of higher education. Sixty-one percent of our students are female, and 87 percent are Caucasian. Kent State's faculty is 63 percent male and 88 percent Caucasian. Kent State undergraduate students graduate with more indebtedness than the national average, and they work more hours per week than the Ohio norm.

This description shows Kent State to be large and complex, with characteristics of traditional residential and innovative metropolitan institutions. Why, given this degree of complexity in its institutional mission, did Kent State decide to apply to be an AQIP Partner Institution?

NCA 2000 Annual Meeting

A small contingent from Kent State attended the NCA April 1-3, 2000, Annual Meeting to learn about the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). With our next comprehensive evaluation in 2004, the timing seemed optimal to investigate this alternative accreditation process. We attended sessions such as "Articulation of the Baldrige Criteria to Meet the Self-Study Guidelines for NCA," "The Journey to Quality," "Introducing the Academic Quality Improvement Project's AQIP Alternative," "Incorporating the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Criteria into Your NCA Accreditation Process," "The Journey to Quality: Is It Far From Here?" and "What We're Learning About Quality and Accreditation." These sessions developed awareness and understanding of NCA's purpose to help its institutions improve by initiating the Academic Quality Improvement Project.

Partnership Request

As a result of attending the Annual Meeting, the following recommendation was forwarded to Provost Paul Gaston on April 4, 2000: Kent State University should investigate the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) as an alternative accreditation method within the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. He reacted with wry humor, saying, "I thought you'd never ask." President Cartwright, too, whose leadership term for AAHE coincided with rising interest - and considerable skepticism - in the higher education community about outcomes assessment and continuous improvement practices, was enthusiastically supportive. Utilizing an informal advisory group of faculty experts from throughout the university, a Partnership Request was completed through the spring and early summer and sent to NCA. Kent was accepted as an AQIP Partner Institution in September 2000.

When administrators and faculty reviewed the AQIP criteria, much skepticism was expressed. Cautionary anecdotal accounts of similar efforts in program accreditations were mentioned in recognition of the revolutionary potential of the movement and of the facts that it meant going far beyond business as usual. In fact, much of the value of the application process was to help us learn more about our own current efforts and the depth of expertise and experience that already existed on our campus in the area of continuous improvement. Most of this expertise was going into the classroom and into consulting with business and industry on these very concepts!

Campus Readiness

Assessment of the NCA General Institutional Requirements and Criteria contained in Kent State's 1994 Team Report suggested that our accreditation status appeared secure and that no serious shortcomings jeopardized our regional accreditation. Following this determination, public presentations to build awareness about AQIP were made to the President's Cabinet, Chairs and Directors Council, Academic Administrative Council, Provost's Faculty Advisory Council, University Teaching Council, and the College of Nursing faculty. There was good support in each of these groups for pursuing the AQIP alternative accreditation procedure. Some questions from faculty and administrative staff did evidence an appropriate degree of supportive skepticism.

Questions Considered

Several faculty asked why regional accreditation was important to the university. Answers included assurance of quality education for students, accountability to stakeholders, public credibility, the contingency of regional accreditation to obtain federal funds and student loan assurance, and transferability of student academic credit.

Perhaps the most pressing question from these groups was, "What is this alternative accreditation process?" It was suggested that AQIP would emphasize continuous improvement, the seven Baldrige criteria, a focus on students and their learning, and a systematic feedback program. Rather than a several-hundred-page self-study every ten years, Kent State would be expected to write an annual fifty-page report that would examine both processes and outcomes.

As questions arose about why we should participate in AQIP, we tended to rely on the materials provided by NCA. For example, AQIP provides a framework for assessing, measuring, and improving performance in our learning, operations, and financial procedures. AQIP also provides a mechanism to get feedback from peer institutions that will help identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, we felt that we already met the GIRs and that there would be much more to be gained from this alternative process. We also hoped that, as an early participant, we would have an opportunity to help shape the AQIP process. Lastly, we felt there might be an opportunity to better focus a distinctive identity for our institution.

Assessing Readiness for AQIP

Completing the AQIP Partnership Request caused us to evaluate our readiness for participation. There was agreement that while we had several experiences with quality programs in three divisions, no comprehensive, institution-wide TQM or similar movement had been attempted. We had just completed rewriting our strategic plan with the personal involvement of President Cartwright. We had received several outcomes-based Selective Excellence awards from the Ohio Board of Regents. We have a systematic, periodic review process for assessing graduate programs. Many of our academic programs participate in accreditation procedures that emphasize similar principles (business, nursing, education). Kent had also received the Governor's Excellence in Workers' Compensation Award. In addition to receiving external recognition, Kent State also gives formal internal recognition to distinguished teachers, to outstanding researchers, and to alumni, staff, and individuals who make outstanding efforts on behalf of students.

Our executive officers are well-versed in continuous quality efforts. President Carol Cartwright has provided significant leadership to quality improvement initiatives at the national and state levels as well as on behalf of Kent State University. Provost Gaston has provided workshops and participated in national meetings on quality management. Vice President Creamer began his career as an operational and compliance auditor with the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare using tools and techniques similar to Deming's Total Quality

Management. Kent State has used the Student Satisfaction Survey, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program new freshman survey, NASPA benchmarking of student services programs, the ACT Survey of Academic Advising, the National Survey of Student Engagement, and an externally conducted Cultural Self-Study. We have consistently sought data about and from our students, formed committees to review study results, and developed strategies to address problems identified.

Current AQIP Efforts

As this paper is being written in late December 2000, plans are being prepared to pursue a Level II application for the Ohio Award for Excellence (OAE). Kent State's AQIP Liaison and a faculty member have been trained and appointed as examiners for the Ohio Award for Excellence. The OAE uses the same criteria as AQIP and the national Baldrige award program.

Plans are being formulated to provide resources to support the AQIP effort and to train administrators and faculty in the concepts and procedures to enable broad participation. Special care is being taken to develop a macro view for our institutional involvement while keeping that macro view responsive to academic programs. Institutional expectations for course and program objectives are being made explicit and embedded in the regular curricular processes. We are considering hiring outside consultants to help us conceptualize the establishment of systems, processes, and structures to stimulate and audit institutional quality improvement efforts. We feel it is particularly important to engage the academic sector in continuous improvement because most of our past efforts have been in non-academic sectors of the university.

An informal AQIP advisory committee will continue, even while a more formal AQIP Implementation Steering Committee is created. The challenge will be to ensure that reporting and assessment activities take place at an institutional level with meaningful involvement from division, college, and program levels.

Conclusion

While we have approached our decision-making process for joining the Academic Quality Improvement Project through the template provided by NCA, this description does not convey the suspense and excitement of the process. We moved from interest pursued at the 2000 NCA Annual Meeting, to enthusiasm generated by those who attended, to doubt (almost dismay) when the many issues were considered, to hope in the realization that we had experience and expertise to engage meaningfully, to celebration when we found out we were accepted as an AQIP Partner Institution, to realism over the fact that we now have it to do. The decision made on this roller-coaster ride seemed clear from the outset. That is because there is perceived potential for making significant and positive changes in Kent State University's institutional culture through the process methodology embodied in AQIP's continuous improvement project.

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AQIP as a Change Agent in Higher Education: Lessons Learned by a Charter Institution

Laura D. Browne
Cindy Green

Less than two years ago, Iowa Valley Community College District (Iowa Valley) embarked on a reaccreditation/ organizational change journey with three goals in mind: (1) to obtain Iowa Valley's first district accreditation; (2) to achieve that accreditation using the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) paradigm; and (3) using the AQIP tool to identify, implement, and sustain organizational change. Goals one and two were accomplished last October when Iowa Valley was selected as one of fourteen charter members of AQIP and its accreditation was extended to 2007–2008, with a possible additional extension to 2015. Goal three is an ongoing process, and we are near the end of the second year.

District accreditation was a daunting task for a couple of reasons. First, for more than thirty years, Iowa Valley's two distinctive, semi-autonomous, credit-granting units (Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls and Marshalltown Community College in Marshalltown) had been accredited individually. Second, we decided to pursue accreditation using the AQIP paradigm while it was still being developed by NCA. Like the crew of the *Starship Enterprise*, we were going "where no [educational institution] has gone before."

Since 1996, Iowa Valley has been using district Total Quality Management (TQM) teams to address salient institutional issues. One of these teams, tasked with developing the process for Iowa Valley's district accreditation, recognized the viability of using the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Excellence in Education for our self-assessment because it would further our continuous quality improvement efforts. NCA's AQIP paradigm, based on the philosophy of the Baldrige criteria, allows institutions to link ongoing quality improvement efforts to NCA accreditation. Because of the similar quality emphasis, we felt we could easily transition from Baldrige to AQIP once it was completely developed.

Eighteen months later, with our AQIP partnership accepted and our reaccreditation extended seven years, the NCA AQIP teams were completing and documenting our Baldrige-based self-assessment. As the Steering Committee, the team leading the reaccreditation effort, reviewed the team reports, it realized it had failed to evaluate its process and took steps to remedy the oversight.

At the same time the Steering Committing was evaluating its process, the director of that committee attended a leadership workshop where Kotter's article, "Eight Steps to Transforming Your Organization" (*Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1995) was discussed. Kotter indicated that as institutions move through the eight steps of transformation, errors could occur. When we looked at our transformation efforts, we realized errors did occur. Kotter's eight errors are:

1. Not establishing a great enough sense of urgency
2. Not creating a powerful enough guiding coalition
3. Lacking a vision
4. Under-communicating the vision by a factor of ten
5. Not removing obstacles to the new vision

6. Not systematically planning for and creating short-term wins
7. Declaring victory too soon
8. Not anchoring changes in the corporation's culture.

The following is a discussion of the lessons we learned from the errors we made.

The first error we made was "not establishing a great enough sense of urgency" (p. 60). The mandated district accreditation referenced earlier was the basis of our sense of urgency. Limiting this urgency to accreditation only was a potentially fatal error. The consequences of failing to be reaccredited were familiar to most of Iowa Valley's employees; therefore, establishing a sense of urgency regarding reaccreditation was relatively easy. We were able to establish the need to complete reaccreditation using a quality model, since it complemented our ongoing quality efforts. The error we made was not establishing a sense of urgency for carrying on continuous organization change. We assumed that past TQM efforts had established awareness that individual team projects impacted the overall institutional change process. This was a flawed assumption. Iowa Valley TQM team members did not recognize that their projects were pieces of a bigger puzzle: organizational change. Because the Steering Committee erroneously assumed this connection had been made, little attention was given to establishing a great enough sense of urgency for maintaining the momentum for continued organizational transformation.

Our second error was "under-communicating the vision" (p. 63). Our purposeful use of paper and electronic media to communicate the vision was not as effective as we had hoped. We eventually realized that many people were not reading our communications. In some instances, the technology of the Intranet was a deterrent; in other cases, people were overwhelmed by the amount of information provided. We found people preferred to participate in meetings or have informal (purposeful) conversations about AQIP accreditation rather than read Intranet postings, minutes of meetings, quality manuals, or newsletters.

Our last error was "declaring victory too soon" (p. 66). Kotter warned that premature celebrations would kill momentum, and when Iowa Valley's president announced that we had achieved accreditation, we lost much of the momentum necessary to sustain our organizational change efforts. Many District employees, grounded in the traditional accreditation model, believed their work was done. So much for continuous organizational change!

We have learned a great deal; most of which can be summed up in this quote from Dr. Stephen Spangehl, NCA-AQIP Director:

> Most of the institutions I have talked to that have been doing systematic quality improvements tell me that they didn't invest as much as they should have ... at the front end in cultural shifting, in training people to think in new ways, to think in terms of process, to think about working in teams of a cross-institutional nature where people from many different kinds of positions brought their perspectives to bear on a common problem (Kent Sate University, 9-8-00).

Kotter noted that organizational transformation often takes five to ten years (p. 67). While the evaluation of our Steering Committee's leadership process showed our mistakes, it also showed many of the things we did well. Thus, Iowa Valley's transformation journey continues.

Laura D. Browne is Associate Dean of Developmental Services at Iowa Valley Community College District in Marshalltown.

Cindy Green is Dean of Instruction at Iowa Valley Community College District in Marshalltown.

SWIMM, Don't Flounder: Two-Year Institutions Respond to NCA's Total Quality Initiative

Sherrill L. McCormack
Linda Johnson

What Is SWIMM?

In 2000, five two-year institutions accepted NCA's invitation to explore the AQIP model for accreditation and joined a colloquium, SWIMM–an acronym formed by the first letters of the five states represented in the colloquium. The colloquium encourages exchange of total quality models and offers a forum for discovery about benchmarking and data sharing.

SWIMM is comprised of Southeast Technical Institute in South Dakota, Chippewa Valley Technical College in Wisconsin, Iowa Valley Community College District in Iowa, Alexandria Technical College in Minnesota, and Crowder College in Missouri. Each institution is at a different stage of quality improvement, and each has used a different technique to achieve its current status. Three of the members are technical institutions, while two are a combination of liberal arts and technical studies.

Colloquium History

Initially, the Self-Study Coordinators and members of the college assessment teams from the institutions exchanged email addresses, and early correspondence began. Then, Alexandria Technical coordinated a conference call for the institutions to learn about one another. This allowed each representative to explain his or her institution's quality process. The email correspondence continued, with Iowa Valley agreeing to coordinate a meeting for the group during the NCA Annual Meeting in April 2000. The group increased to its current membership of five institutions by the time of the Annual Meeting in 2000.

This first face-to-face meeting was also useful in that the coordinators and other administrators, including presidents, from the five institutions met to discuss direction, purpose of the group, and assisting NCA-AQIP in the development process. Institutions discussed the type of quality assessment tool being used by each. These tools ranged from Malcolm Baldrige to Pacesetter to state quality assessment tools.

To further these discussions, a follow-up meeting was planned at a central location for June 2000. Iowa Valley hosted the one-day meeting at their Marshalltown facility. During this meeting, details of each institution's process were presented. Results of meetings with NCA-AQIP were reported, and a conference call with Eleanor Harrison provided answers to further questions. Additionally, Iowa Valley volunteered to host a listserve for participants, and Crowder College volunteered to host a web site, SWIMM.org, to assist with data comparisons. This site allows the institutions to exchange results relating to the nine AQIP Criteria.

The 2001 NCA Annual Meeting will be the site for the third face-to-face meeting. Technology has proven essential for communicating, but these in-person meetings are also necessary.

Challenges of Colloquia Participation

Embracing total quality principles represents a major paradigm shift from the traditional organizational structures of most academic institutions. Therefore, participants in the colloquium had to carefully consider whether the new accreditation model was a viable option for their institutions. Members shared details of their quality processes—successes and failures. Although sharing failures can be difficult, the struggles of each organization have been helpful to other colloquium members. Trust is also an important and essential aspect of membership.

Participants discussed several issues/questions: (1) What traditional organizational structures can be incorporated into this new model? What structures are in place? (2) What background and training did the faculty and staff in your organization have? What will they need? (3) What quality self-assessment tool is the most effective? Does the type of tool matter? Can we use state quality awards for the NCA process?

Benchmarking is one of the primary goals of the group, and it remains one of the greatest challenges. Few two-year institutions have won national quality awards, and few comparative data are available. Some colloquium members are participating in state quality awards and using those self-assessments as tools for accreditation.

Additionally, as the group moves forward, we are considering: (1) What information is feasible to share? (2) How do we share politically sensitive data? (3) How public should we make this information?

Initially, several indirect measures such as employer, graduate, and student satisfaction surveys are being compared. As the process progresses, members will tackle the challenge of sharing direct measures of student academic achievement.

Finally, due to geographical distance, institutions face the challenge of maintaining momentum. While in-person meetings create excitement and interest, participants return to their institutions and daily assignments. Communication begun through the initial meetings must be continued through regular and committed use of the listserve and updating and checking the web site.

Benefits of Colloquium Participation

The most immediate benefit of the colloquium has been the exchange of experiences among the participants from the various institutions. Learning that other schools have followed similar paths is both informative and reassuring. The impetus for new ideas frequently occurs when groups can exchange openly and in a climate of trust. As the SWIMM members discuss their processes, we discover that some institutions are utilizing surveys some of us have not considered, and the willingness to share surveys is a great benefit. Since all colleges in the partnership are in different states, and are separated by considerable distance, there has been no sense of "competitive threat" in sharing performance data and results. This perspective of external partners looking at an organization is a valuable tool for quality improvement.

Future Plans of SWIMM

SWIMM members see continued benefits from participation in the colloquium. As further use of the web site occurs, additional comparison and benchmarking will take place. Continued communication and comparison of processes will help each of the institutions in their quality improvement processes. The SWIMM Team listserve and the SWIMM.org web site are key vehicles for accomplishing these goals.

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Linda Johnson is an English Instructor, Assessment Coordinator, and Self-Study Co-Chair at Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Innovative Designs: Building Strength on Strength

Dave Weber
Don Supella

Created in 1915, Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC) has the distinction of being Minnesota's oldest community college. RCTC also has the distinction of being located in America's fiftieth fastest-growing metropolitan area. The combination of rich tradition and high-speed economic growth offer RCTC significant challenges.

A consolidated college, RCTC combines the best in liberal arts, technical, and lifelong learning. The college offers 70 technical and transfer programs and serves nearly 6500 students in credit-based programs and 11,000 in workforce education offerings. Located at the University Center Rochester, RCTC, a scenic 400-acre campus, is nestled in the Mayo Run environmental corridor in southeastern Minnesota. Minnesota's two public higher education systems (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and the University of Minnesota) collaborated to create the unique campus called University Center Rochester. This shared campus, home of Rochester Community and Technical College, Winona State University-Rochester Center, and the University of Minnesota Rochester, offers learning opportunities that range from community lifelong learning to customized training and doctoral programs—all in one physical location. Rochester Community and Technical College is the primary provider of lower-division and customized training courses for the University Center.

The challenge facing all higher education institutions, but especially one located in an economic and population "boom town," is one of matching performance to purpose. Last year RCTC launched a strategic academic planning process, Innovative Designs, intended to connect master academic and strategic planning to accreditation and quality. At last year's NCA Annual Meeting, RCTC shared its alternative approach to reaccreditation, an approach centered around the Minnesota Council for Quality's Baldrige assessment process. Using Innovative Designs as a foundation, RCTC's quality journey continues this year as we prepare for an April 2001 on-site reaccreditation visit. This year's journey, Innovative Designs: Building Strength on Strength, provides evidence of Rochester Community and Technical College's continued focus on using results to improve teaching and learning.

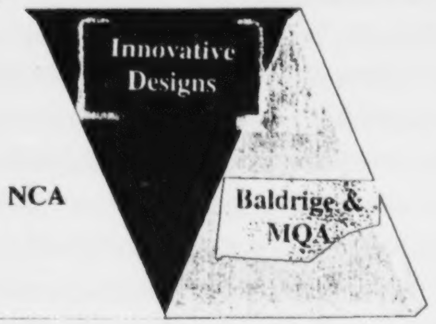
Key to continuous improvement is an understanding of the environment or a scan of the landscape. Our environment is being shaped by changing stakeholder perceptions of value including the:

- Demand for relevancy
- Desire for accelerated degree completion
- Expectation of accessibility
- Realization that the goals of many students are not to earn a certificate, diploma, or degree
- Request for flexibility and convenience
- Need to balance work, family, and education

A close look at the institutional changes that must occur to meet the challenges of a new model for higher education while fulfilling our NCA self-study obligation led RCTC to create our Innovative Designs approach.

Innovative Designs 3-2-1

"Plan, Do, Check, Act." It is the "doing" and "acting" that can hold higher education hostage. To help assure action to our planning and studying, RCTC adopted a 3-2-1 slogan to our Innovative Designs effort at linking planning, quality, and accreditation. This Innovative Designs 3-2-1 initiative creates a quality-based approach to accountability that aligns academic and strategic planning with accreditation in an environment of continuous improvement. The Innovative Designs approach incorporates three areas of focus, two initiatives, and one goal. The triangles identify Innovative Designs' three areas of focus: accreditation, strategic planning, and quality. The two initiatives are (1) to gain NCA reaccreditation using a Baldrige-based assessment process, and (2) to align RCTC with the needs of students, stakeholders, and the community using a strategic planning process involving both internal and community stakeholders. Our one goal is to continuously improve. The Innovative Designs 3-2-1 approach allows for the:

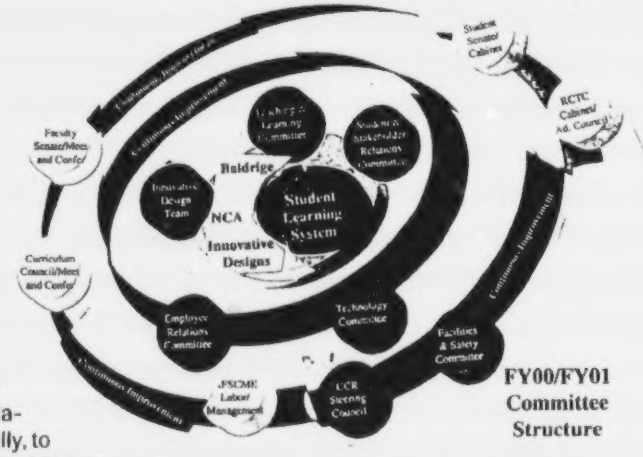

Innovative Designs
NCA
Baldrige & MQA

- development of an integrated model aligning accreditation with strategic, academic, facilities, technological, and operational planning using Baldrige and the Minnesota Quality Award Performance Excellence Framework;
- promotion of greater synergies and alignment between quality improvement, assessment, institutional research, and strategic planning;
- emphasis on teaching and learning as our key system while redefining processes to support teaching and learning;
- creation of a student-centered college focused on continuous improvement and shared learning;
- development of a systematic approach that aligns short-term work plans with a long-term view of the future.

What is the value of implementing this innovative design approach? RCTC's unique approach promotes continuous versus episodic organizational assessment and review, provides a comprehensive framework assuring year-to-year improvement, supports continuous improvement by building on strengths, and assures that college resources are aligned.

Organizing for Quality

At last year's NCA Annual Meeting, RCTC shared its unique committee structure. The structure, intended to support the Innovative Designs model, integrates traditional committees with new committees reflecting the Baldrige Performance Excellence Criteria. This out-of-this-world committee structure links all committees and work units in a relational versus a hierarchical organizational structure. Included in the new structure is an Innovative Designs Committee, composed of representatives from other all-college committees including Teaching and Learning, Student and Stakeholder Relations, Employee Relations, and Technology. Additionally, to facilitate the college's desire for broad-based college-wide support for Innovative Designs, comprehensive staff development activities and a diverse communications plan have been implemented. Implementation methods, successes, and opportunities for improvement resulting from our flight into outer space are shared in the 2001 presentation.


Student Senate/ Cabinet
RCTC Cabinet/ Ad. Council
Faculty Senate/Meet and Confer
Continuous Improvement
Continuous Improvement
Teaching & Learning Committee
Student & Stakeholder Relations Committee
Baldrige
Innovative Design Team
NCA
Student Learning System
Innovative Designs
Curriculum Council/Meet and Confer
Continuous Improvement
Employee Relations Committee
Technology Committee
Facilities & Safety Committee
AFSCME Labor/ Management
UCR Steering Council
Continuous Improvement

FY00/FY01 Committee Structure

Innovative Designs Strategic Planning

Shortly before our 2000 NCA presentation, RCTC formed a Futures Task Force to focus on the strategic planning portion of our 3-2-1 focus. The result of our strategic plan will be a more agile, flexible organization responsive to student, stakeholder, and community needs. A major part of our 2001 NCA presentation will be the sharing of our journey toward the completion of this 18-month process. The planning process included both internal and external stakeholders and has six primary stages.

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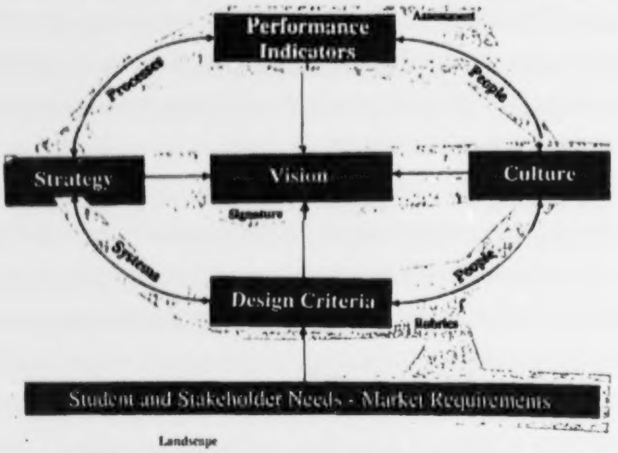
Innovative Designs Planning Stage 1: Landscape Analysis

Landscape analysis or an environmental scan, the first stage of the Innovative Designs process, was used to identify the market requirements of students and other stakeholders. Key trends were identified to help determine our design criteria. These trends were prioritized based on the influence and impact each is expected to have on RCTC's future.



Innovative Designs Planning Stage 2: Signature Review

The second stage of the Innovative Designs process was signature review. The college's signature includes the statements, symbols, and the words defining the college in the marketplace. This process included a review, reaffirmation, and/or redrafting of the college vision, mission and belief statements, slogans, logos, and other visual images. As part of this process, RCTC defined key terms and identified essential characteristics within these signature statements. These definitions and identifications helped establish a shared language and culture, which will support the identification of key performance indicators later in the planning process.

☐ **"The RCTC Signature"**

Vision. Rochester Community and Technical College will be a world-class provider of technical, liberal arts, and lifelong learning.

Mission. Rochester Community and Technical College provides accessible, affordable quality educational opportunities to a diverse community.

Values. We believe:

- ○ Learning is a lifelong process reflected in an academic continuum of developmental, general, technical, and transfer and continuing education.
- ○ Quality educational opportunities must be affordable, convenient, and geographically accessible for all students.
- ○ Open educational access requires the use of a variety of instructional strategies and technologies to accommodate individual learner needs and varied learning styles.
- ○ Quality and excellence occur in a continuous improvement climate that recognizes emerging technologies, values applied experiences, and advances community and business partnerships.
- ○ Students deserve a respectful, safe, and caring environment that supports personal growth and embraces diversity.
- ○ Student life enriches educational, career, cultural, recreational, and social development in preparation for citizenship in a global society.
- ○ Student services enhance educational experiences, promote personal well-being, and support student success.
- ○ Public investment in higher education assumes a promise of fiscal responsibility.
- ○ Higher education in a multicultural setting values academic freedom, develops critical thinking, and accepts philosophical differences.

Innovative Designs Planning Stage 3: Formation of Design Criteria

The third stage was the establishment of design criteria. Design criteria are features that must be present within programs, departments, and services in order to respond to trends and challenges facing RCTC; some might call them aims or goals. The vision, mission, values, and market trend analysis resulted in more than 120 ideas deemed important by our Futures Task Force. Using quality tools, the original 120 design criteria ideas were narrowed to 18 and then further synthesized to three critical design criteria that will be embedded into all institutional assessment and planning activities. The Rochester Community and Technical College Design Criteria are:

1. The mission and vision are modeled in the delivery and support of teaching and learning.
2. The college aligns resources to support the mission and vision.
3. The performance of the college demonstrates continuous improvement.

To set performance standards for each design criterion, rubrics were created. Join us as we share the "chocolate tasting session model" that helped faculty and staff grasp rubric creation. Each design criterion, then, has a set of performance standards comprised of four components: a benchmark or standard, desired results, elements of performance that must be completed to achieve the desired result (design criteria), and a clear description of acceptable performance.

Innovative Designs Planning Stage 4: Establishment of a Desired Culture

The fourth stage in the Innovative Designs process is to establish a statement of desired culture that defines the essential characteristics needed to live our vision, mission, and strategic goals. Once again, the Futures Task Force utilized quality processes and tools that resulted in the establishment of a statement of desired culture. Because culture has as much impact as does strategy in the attainment of strategic goals, a significant effort focused on the creation of RCTC's desired culture.

☐ **Statement of Desired Culture**

Rochester Community and Technical College will create a learning community and work culture characterized by the following traits:

- Respecting…the differences and values of all stakeholders
- Celebrating…our successes/having fun
- Treating…students and stakeholders to their delight
- Collaborating…through open communication, encouraging innovation

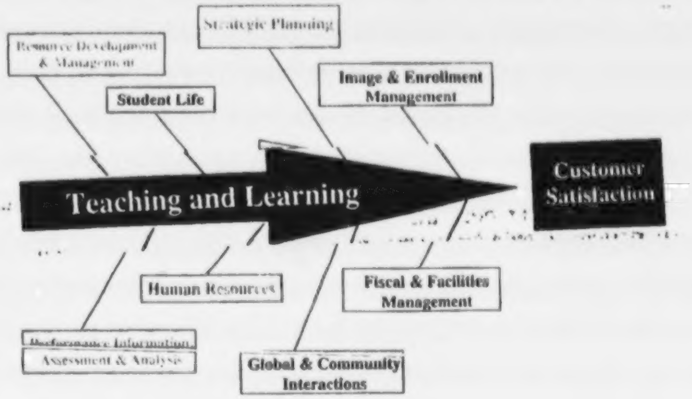
These characteristics and behaviors are essential to strategic success.

Innovative Designs Planning Stages 5 and 6: Identification of Performance Indicators and Strategy Deployment

The fifth and sixth stages of Innovative Designs are the identification of key performance indicators and the development of strategic deployment. The college has identified five major indicator clusters: teaching and learning, satisfaction, partnerships, continuous improvement, and resources. At this writing, these five indicator clusters are in an early draft format. Key performance indicators, strategic priorities, and strategic deployment are next steps to identify in Stages 5 and 6. Eventually, tied to the six stages and the resultant strategic plan, each area of the college will submit annual work plans, including performance indicators, priorities, and strategies that support RCTC's goals. A web-based information dissemination approach will be implemented, providing for rapid access to information and alignment of work throughout the college. At the April NCA meeting, we intend to share progress on Stages 5 and 6 of our Innovative Designs Plan.

A Systems and Process Approach

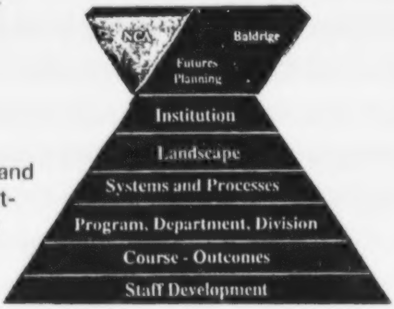
Supporting these Innovative Designs planning stages is a system and process approach to managing the college. To facilitate the goal of continuous improvement, RCTC has identified nine major systems that function in the college. At the center of these systems is teaching and learning, the heart, soul, and reason for our existence. The eight other systems support the design and delivery of teaching and learning. Process and functional teams for each of the nine functional areas are currently identifying and documenting key processes and indicators. Upon completion of the Innovative Designs Strategic Plan, systems and processes will be reviewed for alignment to RCTC's strategic goals.


RCTC Key Systems and Processes
Strategic Planning
Resource Development & Management
Student Life
Image & Enrollment Management
Teaching and Learning
Customer Satisfaction
Human Resources
Fiscal & Facilities Management
Performance Information Assessment & Analysis
Global & Community Interactions

Performance Assessment and Management

The combination of vision, mission, values, design criteria, rubrics, statement of desired culture, key performance indicators, and strategic priorities create a report card or balanced scorecard to identify what is important and what will be measured to determine success. Combined with the Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, this process provides a structure and approach to review and assess organizational performance, align the organization, manage systems and processes, and continuously improve. Six layers of assessment will provide feedback for RCTC to continuously improve. For each dimension, design criteria will provide a consistent link for review and improved performance. During the 2000-2001 academic year, the focus of assessment has been on program review.

Innovative Designs


NCA
Baldrige
Futures Planning
Institution
Landscape
Systems and Processes
Program, Department, Division
Course - Outcomes
Staff Development

Dimensions of Assessment

Participation in the Minnesota Assessment and Quality Awards Program

Vital to our journey has been the support of colleagues both formally and informally. Active participation in CQIN, identification of NCA Colloquia partners, and the support and feedback of the Minnesota Council for Quality have helped keep us enthusiastic. The Minnesota Council for Quality sponsors the Minnesota Quality Awards, a noncompetitive Minnesota Assessment Program. In 1999, RCTC was the only private or public Minnesota business or organization to participate in the Minnesota Assessment Program. As a participant, RCTC administered the Baldrige Express Survey to staff. The survey feedback results were supplemented by a campus site visit conducted by a team of quality evaluators who also provided an extensive feedback report based on Baldrige-driven Minnesota Quality Awards criteria.

NCA Reaccreditation

This past fall, RCTC once again participated in the Minnesota Quality Awards. RCTC's self-assessment used in the awards process also serves as the primary document of our NCA self-study. In April, a team of NCA consultant-evaluators, with a background in the Baldrige criteria, will conduct our reaccreditation on-site visit.

For additional information on RCTC's Innovative Designs initiative contact Dave Weber at (507) 285-7217 or dave.weber@roch.edu.

Dave Weber is Director of Marketing at Rochester Community and Technical College in Rochester, Minnesota.

Don Supella is President of Rochester Community and Technical College in Rochester, Minnesota.

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Library Improvements at Samford University: Listening to the Voice of the Customer

James C. Eck
Archie Lockamy III

Introduction

During the early 1990s, Samford University's quality initiative encouraged the university to seek the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. As part of that award process, Samford University collected data regarding its evidence of quality. Although the university did not receive the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the process was beneficial to the university. Opportunities for improvement still exist, however, and we offer a few insights about how Total Quality Management (TQM) led to higher levels of effectiveness in terms of library services.

Samford University embarked upon its own quality mission beginning in 1989 with a series of discussions to explore what the elements of TQM were and how those elements might be brought into the education arena at Samford University. About that time, they hired Dr. John Harris as Associate Provost for Quality Assessment to provide focus and direct this effort. In April 1991 a Quality Improvement Conference was hosted by and held at Samford University. In attendance were many educational professionals from other colleges and universities as well as several guest speakers in the quality improvement field.

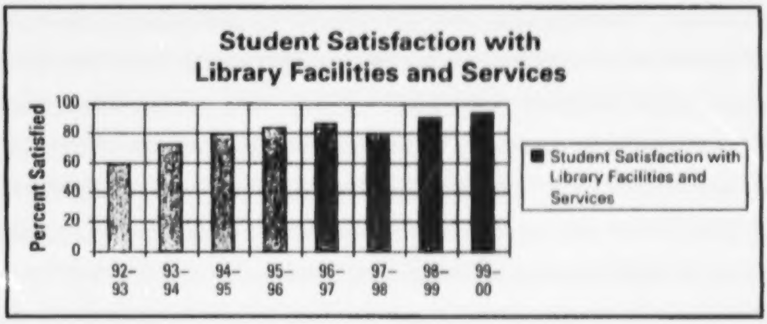
Dr. Corts talked about hearing staff or faculty talk about "if we had money, etc" we could achieve thus and so, for example. What he said about quality management is that it removes the money element and allows people to focus on where they are now and what they can do about it. "Excelling" is easy if you have money to fix everything. Quality management philosophy allows one to look at "better-ness" in increments. True quality management and improvement is not just a "flash and crash" project; it is not a one-time program to talk about and flaunt, one that has great public relations appeal and then is over. Rather it is a continuous improvement effort in all the things we do.

An overriding theme of the conference was that a quality management initiative should be handled with "gentleness." It requires a culture change in many organizations, and it takes some employees a while to see the benefits of the quality process.

Opportunity Recognition

Samford University's commitment to Total Quality Management now spans over a decade. Samford University's adoption of TQM is as comprehensive as any other university in the United States. The TQM effort has led Samford University to emphasize those traits that make this university distinctive. Samford University is distinctive in that our tuition is half the national average for private institutions, yet we fund three professional schools (law, pharmacy, and divinity) that are more typical of larger universities that enroll more than 4500 students. Samford University is also distinctive in that we collect a copious amount of data from our students and we act when we become aware of their concerns. Students' desire for better science labs, for example, resulted in the university's constructing a new science building that cost more than $25 million. Samford University also wants to review student outcome data in order to monitor the extent to which the university is providing a quality education and the degree to which students are satisfied with their experience. The data suggest that there are good reasons for Samford University to feel affirmed in terms of the quality of education being provided to our students.

In addition to specific student outcomes, Samford University surveys students regarding their impressions of services offered on campus. Since 1992, the Davis Library at Samford University has adopted a strong commitment to TQM. Student satisfaction with library facilities and services has increased each year (with the exception of 1997-1998, when the library was undergoing extensive renovation).



Improvement Steps

These improvements are attributable to the leadership of the library's director and her staff. Ten years ago, library staff members were frustrated and demoralized. Consultants evaluated the state of the library, and four librarians (including the director) received quality training. Then, a planning team was formed and the library staff members were surveyed in order to get their comments on needed improvements. The results of the survey enabled the library to focus on one-time actions, possible organizational changes, and ways to improve the library facility. Survey responses indicated that the staff wanted the staff room repainted and that everybody wanted to wear name tags. The library survey also suggested that there were staffing problems within departments (e.g., too may individuals in one area and too few in another) and that similar functions were being performed in several areas. Because of these comments, the library formed a reorganization team to develop a new organizational chart for the library.

The team was successful in its reorganization efforts (e.g., a 21 percent increase in hours that librarians staff the reference desk, a 64.3 percent increase in hours that support staff work in circulation) in large part because the team met four goals/objectives: back everything up with facts, avoid feelings and emotional reactions, strive to reach consensus, and allow the director to have final authority. The most recent renovation of the library (including the creation of a student lounge, additional study rooms, an enlarged collection, computer connections at every table, and a more attractive interior) has resulted in the highest satisfaction levels among students. The library is a clear example of using a TQM approach for moving a student service from a marginal status (58 percent student satisfaction rate) to an exalted status (over 90 percent student satisfaction rate).

Benefits

As a result of library renovations, students now enjoy the following benefits:

- Study carrels and reading rooms are equipped with laptops, personal computers, and other resources.
- All study tables include a computer jack to access Samford's computer network.
- The library also houses a cable television network, individual listening and viewing rooms, and a Technology in Learning instruction center.

Student satisfaction surveys show a steady increase in student satisfaction with library facilities and services since the 1992-93 academic year. The student satisfaction rate was over 90 percent for the 1999-2000 academic year.

Recommendations

Although Samford University's approach to TQM is comprehensive, opportunities for improvement do exist. First, we recommend that Samford publicize the university's efforts in the quality arena in order to increase its competitive edge and distinctiveness. Many faculty and students are unaware of Samford University's commitment to quality, and the university must adequately inform all of its stakeholders. Samford University needs to adopt additional measures of quality (especially qualitative measures) and incorporate opinions from all customers (metro students, professional students, graduate students, faculty, staff, etc.). Samford University must incorporate opinions from external customers (e.g., the views of local businessmen/women concerning skills desired among MBA graduates) and broaden its level of communication about quality both internally and externally.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, these data suggest that customer focus and satisfaction is a point of distinction at Samford University. The customer's perception of the quality of service that an institution extends is a major factor in every operational organization. How an institution commits itself to satisfying customers is similarly vital to the success of any educational institution, especially for the quality of services that it implements into its own educational services.

Downsizing, retrenchment, and doing more with less have become themes for most institutions of higher education. Productivity now has a sense of urgency as institution after institution struggles with shrinking resources. TQM has allowed Samford University to avoid problems associated with declining enrollments and budget shortfalls. Samford University's mission is to nurture persons, for God, for learning, forever. Underlying the institution's approach to achieving its stated purpose is a concept that should be the primary focus of all colleges and universities–quality.

James C. Eck is Director of Institutional Research at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

Archie Lockamy III is Professor of Operations Management at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

A Two-Year Technical College Approach to Delivering Quality Workforce Training

Jan Cota
Teri Bradel
Mary Eaton

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion, session participants will have an overview of how the ISO quality standard, a traditionally manufacturing-based system, was applied by a two-year technical college providing workforce-training services. Participants will learn firsthand the benefits, costs, and "best practices" as a result of implementing a quality standard through presentation, simulation, and discussion.

Introduction: NTC CTS/ED Background Information

Custom Training Services and Economic Development (CTS/ED) is the division of Northwest Technical College (NTC) charged with providing a nontraditional external delivery system of consulting and educational services. These are provided to business, government, and nonprofit organizations. NTC, through the CTS/ED division, seeks to:

- Establish strategic economic development alliances at regional and state levels
- Maintain and strengthen customer relationships
- Deliver quality workforce and organizational programs
- Continuously seek new business and the development of industry relationships.

In an effort to continuously improve services and products delivered to business clients, CTS/ED took the initiative to investigate options available for implementing a quality system.

Selection of ISO as the CTS/ED Quality Standard

The method chosen by CTS/ED to analyze and improve our system and control the quality of products and services provided is the ISO 9000 standard. ISO provides CTS/ED with a vehicle to assure customers of our reliability and competence to deliver our products and services.

The purpose of ISO is to facilitate international commerce by providing a single set of standards that people everywhere would recognize and respect. International Standards Organization is the globally recognized quality standard used by more than 25,000 businesses in 90 countries worldwide. Located in Switzerland and established in 1947 to develop common international standards, its members come from over 90 countries.

In general, ISO assumes that a wide variety of elements influence product quality. The ISO 9001 Standard has 20 elements and requires control of the characteristics that make up these elements. Areas covered by the elements include items such as:

- Management leadership
- Planning
- Operations
- Organization
- Records
- Design
- Training
- Purchasing

ISO provides an opportunity to support NCA accreditation of Northwest Technical College programs and offerings by providing:

- Credibility - quality model that is recognized by our customers and business and industry internationally
- Integrity - quality focus aligned with our mission statement
- Structure - model for documented processes and procedures
- Evidence - model for decision by fact (records).

Implementation of the ISO Standard

Implementation of the ISO standard has resulted in a defined Quality Policy Statement as follows:

> Northwest Technical College's Custom Training Services and Economic Development (CTS/ED) Division is committed to customer satisfaction by providing products and services that consistently meet or exceed our business and industry customer's requirements in regard to quality of product, quality of service, and overall value in an environment of continuous improvement.

Critical to the implementation of the ISO standard is:

- Management leadership and participation
- Assign system director
- Contract consultant/coach
- Contract intranet specialist (paper or electronic decision)
- Training
  - Training orientation
  - Writing
  - Internal auditing
  - Root cause analysis
  - Proposal development
  - Needs assessment/performance outcome identification
  - Hands-on online
- Establish writing teams–all management level, including V.P.
- Internal audit participation by all management levels, including V.P.
- Monthly agenda time–documentation draft presentations and training

Benefits/Challenges/Investment

Our ISO experience has given us a unique perspective since we are a service organization and not involved in manufacturing processes. Consequently, we have learned the do's and don'ts of applying the ISO standard in a nonmanufacturing setting. We have experienced firsthand the benefits and costs in financial and human terms in implementing a quality system standard.

- Client benefits
    1. Demonstrate to clients that we "walk the talk"
    2. Established strategic planning goals aligned with quality policy statement
    3. Established client needs assessments: "How will we know if we succeed?"
    4. Established client proposals & contracts with performance outcomes
    5. Improved client response time: system efficiencies
    6. Consistent product quality: product consistency and method to address quality issues
- Internal benefits
    1. Clarified staff roles and responsibilities
    2. Documented policies, processes, and procedures
    3. Established systematic method for continuous improvement
    4. Single access to controlled documentation
    5. Integrated business management system
    6. Time and system efficiencies
- Challenges/solution
    1. Interpreting standard and applying to our business/consultant-coach
    2. Time: assign project leader and establish regular agenda time
    3. Establishing system and documentation boundaries/learn from experience
    4. Establishing value to all internal stakeholders/establish regular agenda time
    5. Communication in multi-site organization/use of intranet
    6. Human impact and ownership/training, regular involvement
- Investment
    1. Consultant
    2. Intranet specialist
    3. System director
    4. Registrar
    5. Time

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

1. Quality is a process, not an event.
2. Quality does not require "perfect" to get started.
3. Maintain buy-in and ownership by providing needed resources.

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Chapter 9

New Designs in Higher Education

Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Gaining and Maintaining Faculty Participation in Assessment

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Mid-Cycle Assessment Review: A Mechanism for Creating a Positive Assessment Culture

Jessica L. Jonson
Thomas C. Calhoun

Introduction

In "Proclaiming and Sustaining Excellence: Assessment as a Faculty Role" (1998), Schilling and Schilling "suggest ways to approach assessment that are more congenial to the traditional faculty role." Their suggestions are important because they can facilitate the changes needed to create a culture of assessment—that is, a culture where assessment evidence is tied to decision making and leads to improvement of educational programs. Our institution has attempted to adopt these approaches through a process we call the Mid-Cycle Assessment Review. The purpose of the review is two-fold:

1. Reflection and suggestions: Provides a forum where a focused discussion about assessment activities allows faculty to reflect on their assessment efforts and obtain suggestions or ideas for improving their assessment plans so they can gain meaningful and useful information about student learning.
2. Communication: Provides a mechanism for: (a) clarifying the expectations for assessment efforts, (b) sharing successful assessment strategies used by other colleges/programs at UNL or other institutions, and (c) obtaining a broad sense of where the institution stands in its assessment efforts.

The need for this process is illustrated by a review team's report in a recent academic program review:

> The Department's procedures for assessing student learning in the major are remarkably thorough, but whether the benefits to the Department and its teaching mission outweigh the very obvious costs is not clear. In discussing the results of last year's assessment with the Undergraduate Chair and his committee, we were not convinced that the attempt to quantify student learning by scoring student performance in a number of inevitably subjective categories had yielded meaningful results. In contrast, the exit survey the Department administered to outgoing seniors apparently provided many helpful insights into the undergraduate experience. The committee [peer review team] suggests that the Department search for ways to simplify its assessment instruments so that the costs in faculty time are not so great, and it urges the administration to accept a range of assessment procedures that reflect realistic possibilities for measuring student outcomes.

The comments of the review team reflect the frustration of those faculty who believe that the costs of assessment outweigh its benefits. Recognizing that the program review serves multiple purposes, we chose to deal with this aspect of faculty frustration outside of the program review process by developing a mid-cycle assessment review that occurs two to three years before the program review. During the mid-cycle review, the University-wide Assessment Coordinator studies the department's assessment plan; reads its reports; and meets with the faculty to address issues of assessment objectives, design, and methodology. We anticipate that this process, given time, will assist faculty in developing useful and reliable assessment measures.

A second concern raised by the review team's comments is their lack of familiarity with either assessment design or university and college policies regarding assessment. Although they suggest assessment simplification and echo the faculty's frustration, they offer no guidance as to how faculty might simplify assessment and obtain meaningful results.

Their suggestion that the administration be urged to accept a range of assessment procedures points out the review team's lack of familiarity with university and college guidelines that already accept a broad range of assessment procedures. And, they appear to be unaware that the assessment plan was designed by the faculty, not imposed on them by administration. Recognizing that few program review teams will have either interest or expertise in assessment design and that many will have only nominal familiarity with university policies, the mid-cycle review process was developed to focus on issues of assessment design. The program review team can then be expected to focus on the issue of program quality.

Background

The preceding example from a program review team's report illustrates several of the reasons why our institution's University-wide Assessment Committee created the mid-cycle assessment review process. A document drafted by the committee to establish the review process, fully explains its reasons:

> The office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs has a responsibility to ensure that guidelines relating to assessment information have been followed by each unit in its academic program review. Given that the effectiveness of UNL's assessment plan hinges upon assessment being successfully integrated into the APR [academic program review] and accreditation processes, having a way to encourage and monitor this integration is needed. The following plan assumes that units have implemented assessment plans having characteristics described by the university plan and that they have documented their assessment activities in annual reports to their deans.
>
> Depending upon accreditation standards and the training and interests of external review teams, there may be no mention in a team's report of the assessment efforts of the faculty, which can convey the impression that such efforts are not valued. This plan ensures that at some point in the program review process, assessment activities are focused upon. In addition, employing explicit criteria makes it clear that the university has standards that should serve as goals for programs as they develop and refine their assessment plans. Nevertheless, despite this degree of standardization, faculty are left great latitude in determining the objectives to be measured and how they measure the achievement.
>
> With responsibility for assessment activities changing frequently, annual reports alone are unlikely to convey the broader picture of how or whether assessment is contributing to the growth of a program. Instituting a formal assessment review is intended to encourage reflection upon the cumulative effects of the assessment process. The mid-cycle review emphasizes the university's commitment to a process of outcomes assessment that provides the information necessary for formative program evaluation.[1]

This mid-cycle review process complements the institution's annual reporting process in which deans are asked to forward each department's assessment report or a summary of assessment activities (program and college level). Using this information as a basis for discussion, the mid-cycle review process then provides an opportunity for the University-wide Assessment Coordinator to: (1) interact with faculty responsible for the assessment process within a college or program, (2) offer suggestions as to how assessment activities might be improved, or (3) gain insights to share with other programs and colleges. A five-year rotation schedule that will result in a review being conducted with all of the institution's academic units was implemented in fall 1998.

Following the completion of the first mid-cycle reviews, the University-wide Assessment Steering Committee revised the review process to provide a complete copy of the mid-cycle review report (rather than a summary) to the college dean. This change provided the same level of confidentiality as in an academic program review but gave the dean more information on assessment activities within a department. A second modification to the process, made at the conclusion of the fourth mid-cycle report, was to give the department an opportunity to respond to the mid-cycle report. This response enabled departments to correct or clarify information contained in the report and to comment on suggestions offered by the University-wide Assessment Coordinator.

Experiences with the Process

The extent to which the two purposes of the review, mentioned in the introduction, have been served up to this point are discussed below.

Purpose 1: Reflection and Suggestions

One goal of the review is to assist a department in determining the usefulness of the assessment process in improving student learning. Two criteria are used in determining whether an assessment process is useful. First, how well does the assessment process provide insight into learning issues that interest the department? Second, does the amount of faculty time invested in conducting assessment result in the evidence needed to improve the educational process? Focusing on these criteria in mid-cycle reviews resulted in the following lessons:

- Alternative strategies for directly measuring student learning were explored once it was determined that the current method was requiring an inordinate amount of faculty time and was not providing useful evidence about student learning. The alternative strategies proposed, would make better use of existing courses and course products, rather than administering an additional process beyond students' coursework. The benefit in using these alternative strategies is that they would minimize the demand on faculty time and provide useful information.

- The issues underlying the redesign of a major served as a focus for also redesigning the assessment process for that major. Because the new major attempted to improve the "progressivity" of the curriculum, obtaining assessment information from students throughout their program (in addition to information collected at the conclusion of their program) was considered. This additional information would assess student learning developmentally as well as provide a mechanism for monitoring distinctions outlined for different course levels.

- It was suggested that indicators of student learning representing various inputs, processes, and outputs in the educational process be linked to improve their usefulness. This would involve determining which inputs affected the processes that affected outputs. Linking could assist in determining how modification of one indicator led to changes or improvements of other indicators. In addition, linking indicators could assist in determining what changes might lead to improvements in student learning and whether additional information was needed to obtain more compelling and useful evidence about student learning.

- Because only a small number of majors graduated from a program each year, it was difficult to draw accurate conclusions about student learning from the assessment evidence. It was suggested that assessment evidence be collected every year but analyzed only every few years. This scheduling provided more stable evidence on which to base conclusions about student learning. In addition, this change made time available for addressing the department's other contributions to student learning (graduate programs, service courses, etc.).

- To make the assessment process more manageable, a framework was created to determine which learning objectives were already being assessed by products from existing courses and internships. This exercise ensured that add-on assessment methods would not be created when methods for assessing objectives already existed.

- The appendix of the mid-cycle report was expanded to serve as a toolbox addressing the specific assessment activities and issues of the Department. This toolbox includes practical how-to resources (book excerpts, articles, and checklists); examples from other departments, colleges, or institutions; and frameworks for organizing and structuring assessment activities. Although this appendix was customized for each department, several resources proved to be applicable to almost all circumstances (sample senior surveys, suggestions for writing objectives, etc.).

Purpose 2: Communication

The mid-cycle review has been an effective forum for clarifying expectations and discussing the benefits of outcomes assessment. The coordinator has been told on more than one occasion that the meetings provide faculty with a better sense of how and why assessment should be conducted and reduce their anxiety about the process. Specifically, the mid-cycle review has provided the opportunity to address common misperceptions.

In addition to clarifying expectations and correcting misperceptions, the coordinator specifically and continuously emphasizes that the purpose of the mid-cycle assessment review is to be helpful and constructive to departmental assessment efforts rather than to dictate what the department should be doing. The review does so by encouraging and facilitating assessment activities that a department will find beneficial to the program's unique goals. The coordinator also emphasizes that the purpose of the review is not to focus on a department's assessment results or determine how well the department's students are meeting learning objectives but to focus on the department's assessment processes. This focus assists in determining how well the department's assessment activities are providing information on student learning outcomes that the program can use to improve the educational program.

The review has also been used to share assessment strategies used by other programs and to encourage and facilitate the use of existing data in the assessment of learning outcomes. In this year's mid-cycle reviews, the sharing of the assessment instruments and strategies of other programs were frequently incorporated into the mid-cycle review. For example, senior and alumni surveys used in other departments could be shared among very different disciplines but still provide useful information about methods for assessing student learning (i.e., survey item format or content). In addition, a method used in the Architecture department, for example, that samples student work of varying performance levels could also be used by a variety of departments. This strategy could be universally applied because the technique involved sampling the best, worst, and average performance for comparison from one year to the next.

To illustrate the tone of the mid-cycle review process, a few excerpts from a mid-cycle report written by the University-Wide Assessment Coordinator follows:

> The approach of the department in outlining objectives for those courses which are core to the discipline is an important and appropriate start for measuring student learning in the major. The initiation by the department to inform all…instructors of the learning objectives for the courses is a very productive step in standardizing what students should achieve once they have completed the course.…
>
> Although most of your learning objectives appear clear and measurable, discussion with your faculty indicated that there are a few objectives that do not directly state the goal of student learning. For example, the learning objectives for…indicate that students should have the knowledge and ability to "engage in the historical and contemporary debates in the discipline" and "express ideas orally." These two objectives relate to goals for student learning, but do not provide the direct expectation that would make measurement of them easier. To achieve a clearer statement of the learning expected, these two particular objectives might be changed to say students will have the knowledge and ability to "effectively debate an historical or contemporary issue in the discipline" and "effectively express an idea orally" so that others gain insights into the issue.…
>
> I commend your department for selecting direct measures that capitalize on information produced in everyday course work of key courses. These intact products help eliminate the burden on students and faculty to produce additional measures for assessment purposes. However, there are issues that should be considered given that your assessment is based on individualized artifacts from courses with different instructors making judgments about students' achievement of the objectives.

Faculty's Response

Faculty responses on a survey regarding the mid-cycle assessment review process indicated two things. First, all departments that responded shared the suggestions made by the University-wide Assessment Coordinator with other faculty in the department. How and with whom the information was shared are illustrated in the following comments:

> Highlights of the report were shared with the department curriculum committee and all departmental faculty in a written format. These highlights were then discussed briefly at a department meeting.
>
> The department curriculum/assessment committee has seen copies and the department faculty have received copies. There have been discussions of specific issues that the report addressed.

Second, five of the six departments found that the review assisted in efforts to assess student learning outcomes. The following comments represent how the mid-cycle review assisted in these departments.

> [The review] held [us] accountable for reviewing our curriculum and its effectiveness.
>
> [The review] helped us to see the broader picture between the college and the departments regarding assessment. [The review] helped us to look at our assessment plan as incremental rather than "doing it all at once."
>
> Not only did [the review] prompt us to complete [our] outcomes assessment plans for other academic areas in our department, but insight was provided that allowed us to make the previously created instruments more succinct. Both prompts were appreciated.
>
> [The review] prompted the department to think carefully about the next stage of its major assessment program and to make firm plans for that stage. The discussion of our plans with [the University-wide Assessment Coordinator] helped us clarify purpose and procedures, while validating our general ideas. [The] report and resources she sent were helpful in keeping us on track and out of trouble.

Conclusion

In the future, our institution will continue to develop the mid-cycle review into a forum for faculty to discuss the usefulness of assessment plans and results, how assessment can address issues of interest in student learning, and ways in which assessment efforts can be facilitated by various campus resources. Faculty responses indicate that for the most part the mid-cycle assessment review accomplishes its purposes. The hope for this review is that it will provide feedback to academic units so they can implement meaningful, useful, and efficient plans for assessment. Results from these assessment plans can then be used at the time of Academic Program Review to document program strengths while simultaneously gaining information about where to concentrate limited resources effectively.

Reference

1. *1997 University-wide assessment report: Appendix C, Strengthening the role of student outcomes assessment in academic program review and accreditation*, pp. 3–4.

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An Institution-Wide Procedure for Reviewing and Improving Departmental Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Dennis Holt
Christina L. Frazier

The Challenge

Communicating institutional expectations and monitoring progress while providing units with the flexibility to design and employ assessment processes consistent with their goals and the characteristics of their programs are major challenges with a university-wide faculty-owned program focused on assessment to improve learning. At Southeast Missouri State University, this is accomplished through unit-based assessment plans and yearly assessment reports that are reviewed by the University Assessment Review Committee (UARC). This collegial process, the core of an assessment program that was cited by North Central Association evaluators as an institutional strength, is built on guidelines set out by Cecilia L. López in *Opportunities for Improvement: Advice from Consultant-Evaluators on Programs to Assess Student Learning.*

Evolution of the Procedure

Southeast's assessment plan, approved by NCA in 1994 without stipulations, was developed by the UARC as a continuation of commitments dating from 1967. The UARC–composed of faculty representatives from each college and school, the Director of Assessment, the Director of Institutional Research, student development representatives, and students–is responsible for the continued implementation and modification of the plan. Initially, the academic departments and University Studies (the university's general education program) developed assessment plans for each of their degrees that articulated goals and objectives related to student outcomes, identified methods for assessing student achievement on the outcomes, and defined a procedure for involving faculty in reviewing and responding to the results of assessment. Departments are expected to use multiple methods of assessment and to continually evaluate the success of their assessment programs in terms of the usefulness of the information they produce. Recently, Student Development and Enrollment Management developed similar plans for their units. For some units, the discussions that generated the departmental goals and objectives were a catalyst for change to align the curriculum with the directions they established.

The methods used vary considerably from department to department. Most include data on the performance of their students on the university's writing exit examination. Recently, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) has been administered to upper class students, and some departments are beginning to report these data. Many departments incorporate information from external examinations, including the MFAT, MTASCP, CPA, PRAXIS, and NCLEX. Several have developed their own assessment instruments, ranging from tests to processes for evaluating artifacts from courses. Many plans stress assessment of students' ability to effectively use the information gained in the classroom and demonstrate the skills acquired in the studio and laboratory. The Department of Art invites an outside evaluator to review students' work, while the Department of Music uses a series of faculty-scored juries and recitals. Evaluations of experiential learning, such as internships and practica, are included in numerous plans. Some departments concentrate on assessing students' knowledge and skills as they complete the program, while others determine student progress at multiple points in their course of study.

In the first phase of implementation, which lasted about one year, departments submitted plans to the UARC for approval, and the committee evaluated them using simple criteria: feasibility, identification of student outcomes, acceptability of proposed measures, and process for involving faculty. The committee believed, however, that unless there was a method for monitoring the implementation of departmental plans, it would be likely that many departments would let their proposed assessment efforts take a back seat to the many other day-to-day demands they must face. The long path to a culture of assessment would need to be well-marked with periodic evaluations of progress that communicate in simple and direct terms the institution's expectations for student outcomes assessment.

At about this time, the provost and deans had agreed to institute departmental annual reports summarizing, essentially, the state of the department each year. This summary originally was to include only enrollment trends, faculty productivity, scholarship, and major departmental initiatives, but it was agreed to add a section on student outcomes assessment to this list, where departments were to report the results of their assessment efforts. The first round of reports was disappointing. It was clear that many departmental chairpersons did not understand the UARC's expectations, and formats were highly varied and confusing, even for departments that were known independently to have ongoing assessment programs. Though there was a mechanism for periodic reporting of assessment activities, a simple format for reporting results and a method of evaluating departmental progress toward a culture of assessment was lacking.

The Review Procedure

The committee settled on four essential elements of a departmental assessment report, each building on the preceding components. The "Plan" section provides the basis for the evaluation of the other elements of the report and includes the department's student learning outcomes objectives, a list of the methods used, with each linked to the objectives it assesses, and a description of the procedures, i.e., who does what and when. The "Data" section includes the results obtained from the assessment activities. To facilitate a meaningful analysis of the information, data from the last five years are included when available. In the "Analysis" section, department members summarize the performance of their students with respect to their student learning outcomes objectives and identify strengths and areas of concern. The use of the information and insights gained from the Plan, Data, and Analysis sections to formulate responses, which are reported in the "Response" section, is the critical element of assessment to improve student learning.

Since the UARC's review is intended to be formative rather than summative, communication of the results of the committee's deliberations to the departments is an essential component of the process. Initially the reports were scored as acceptable (1) or not acceptable (0), and the Director of Assessment and the faculty co-chair of the UARC discussed the results with each department chair. In the following year, a rubric, which is readily available to the university community, was developed to provide a structure for committee evaluation, a vehicle for communication of the evaluations to the university community, and a method to quantify a department's current status and progress. The rubric calls for each of the four sections of the report to be scored from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating that a section is undeveloped, 2 that it is developing, 3 that it is established, and 4 that it is exemplary. Committee members record their evaluations of each section and specific comments on a scoring form. The entries on the form are used to provide each department with specific comments on the strengths of each section as well as the committee's concerns. The scores for the Analysis and Response section are also reported as part of the annual departmental profile. At the request of chairpersons or deans, members of the committee meet with departments or college groups to discuss assessment in general or specifics of a department's report. Since each section is evaluated, there is an opportunity for a department's efforts to strengthen a section to be recognized, even if the remainder of the report is still in the developing stage.

The active involvement of the academic deans has been an important component in establishing assessment as part of the university's culture. Each dean receives the scores of all departments in addition to the scores and detailed comments for each of the departments in his/her college. The reports and the current status of assessment activities are shared with the Council of Deans on a regular basis and have been the subject of beneficial discussions. Individual deans have worked in various ways to inspire and help departments improve their assessment activities.

Results

This process has fostered an evolution of assessment on campus. The efforts to make this a faculty-owned and administratively mandated, but not dictated, process have taken time, and the process has not progressed evenly in all departments. In the most recent review cycle, the majority (53 percent) of reports were rated overall as established, and 21 percent achieved exemplary status. However, 21 percent were considered developing, and 5 percent were rated undeveloped. Twenty-one percent showed significant improvement over the previous year's report. One benefit of campus-wide faculty service on the UARC is that committee members act as agents of change in their departments.

The actions of the UARC have changed assessment. For example, many departments had established (3) or exemplary (4) assessment reports for their undergraduate programs, but failed to provide any information for their graduate degrees. As part of the evolution of the process, and consistent with the wording of the rubrics, the committee scored each section that did not include information on the graduate degrees as developing (2). During the next reporting cycle, most departments included information on their graduate programs. The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies is building on this new awareness of assessment at the graduate level through the work of a committee of the Graduate Council.

Most importantly, the process has been used by departments to focus learning opportunities to improve student learning. For example, many departments report reviewing and making specific modifications to courses or their curriculum, including the development of new courses to address identified weaknesses. One department has developed a program involving professionals in the area to enhance students' writing skills, which has resulted in GPA increases for 80 percent of the students involved. The Supplemental Instruction in College Algebra project was initiated to increase student performance and retention of students in college algebra. The Department of Nursing has undertaken a series of actions to strengthen students' performance on the NCLEX licensing examination, resulting in a 15 percent increase in the pass rate.

Scores	Plan	Data	Analysis	Response
1. Undeveloped	Absence of objectives, methods of assessment, statement of procedures for most programs	No data reported for most programs	No analysis and evaluation of student outcomes	No action response reported (action response may be decision to change or maintain program elements)
2. Developing	Objectives, methods of assessment, procedures only partially developed for most programs or not developed for all programs	Data from assessments only partially reported for most programs or not reported for all programs	Some analysis and evaluation of student outcomes for some programs, or a significant number of programs with incomplete analysis and evaluation	Some indication of an action response for some programs; action response indicated but not clearly connected to analysis and evaluation of student outcomes
3. Established	Objectives, methods of assessment, procedures basically in place for all programs	Basic reporting of data for all programs (allowing for some data not to be reported because not yet available)	Some analysis and evaluation of student outcomes for all programs	Consideration of action response for most programs
4. Exemplary	Clearly stated objectives, methods of assessment, procedures and rationale for choice of methods of assessment relative to objectives for all programs	Data clearly reported for all methods of assessment for all programs	Clearly developed and well-thought-out analysis and evaluation for all programs	Clearly stated action response indicating thoughtful use of data for improvement of one or more programs

Reference

López. C. L. 1996. *Opportunities for improvement: Advice from consultant-evaluators on programs to assess student learning* <http://www.ncacihe.org/resources/assessment/97ASSESS.pdf>.

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Sisyphus and the Boulder of Faculty Involvement: Successful Methods to Increase Faculty Involvement in the Assessment Process

Thomas Beery
John Fallon

Overview

Faculty ownership of the assessment process is essential, yet resistance to assessment implementation is common. Too often, faculties commonly view assessment as a time-consuming process that results in the collection of meaningless data. Faculty see themselves as outsiders in a process that has been mandated by administrations and has been forced on institutions by external organizations. Such a view can prove disastrous to an institution and to faculty ownership of the assessment process. Most importantly, lack of faculty buy-in to the assessment process results in uninspired documentation of student learning–and student learning is not the place to go through the motions.

At Lima Technical College, as at many institutions, the faculty had not readily accepted its role in the assessment process aspect of student learning. Even though the college has a well-developed assessment plan that is actively supported by the administration, sustaining the faculty's enthusiasm for and involvement in the assessment process had been much like Sisyphus' attempt to roll the boulder up the hill: some short-term progress made, but few long-term results. Additionally, each time the bolder rolled back down the hill, its fall made a greater indentation from which to begin the next effort.

Over the past two years, the college has adopted a series of innovative, successful procedures to increase faculty ownership of assessment. These efforts have centered around the realization that, in fact, faculty do not care about assessment as it is commonly viewed. However, faculty do care about student learning. Refocusing of the college's assessment initiative away from the assessment process to the improvement of student learning at classroom, program, and institutional levels has resulted in a much more active and enthusiastic faculty attitude about assessment.

Reshaping faculty attitudes toward assessment required both global, institutional-level changes of philosophy and local, program and classroom initiatives that focused directly on teaching and learning.

Global Efforts

☐ Reorganization of the Campus Assessment Committee

Although the campus assessment committee had been a joint committee of faculty and administration, the chief center of power and, therefore, the chief controlling force had been the Director of Assessment. Because this

Director was so knowledgeable and willing to take on responsibilities, it became extremely easy for the rest of the committee to allow him to make all of the important decisions about assessment. Such a situation only enhanced the perception that assessment was a mandated administrative function.

To change this perception and to form a new reality, the entire assessment process was delegated to a faculty committee (with full support of the Vice President for Instruction and the Director of Institutional Research). As the process was reworked, so was the faculty attitude toward assessment. Faculty now own the assessment process, and this ownership has resulted in renewed enthusiasm and a communal sense of responsibility for improving student learning.

☐ Revision of the College Assessment Plan

The college's assessment plan is an excellent one, but like any other assessment tool, it requires regular review. One of the first initiatives of the reorganized campus assessment committee was to revisit the college's assessment plan in an attempt to create more faculty involvement. The committee discovered an unneeded tier of bureaucracy that tended to alienate faculty from the assessment process. The assessment plan was revised to move assessment closer to the classroom, making program chairs and their faculty directly responsible for assessment of student learning in their programs and individual courses. This revision encouraged faculty involvement and made assessment results more meaningful to improving student learning.

☐ Revision of Strategic Planning and the Action Planning Processes

As part of the effort to integrate assessment into the rubric of the college, connecting assessment to the college's strategic planning process was appropriate. The college's action planning process distributes funds for special tactical initiatives beyond base budget. Planning dollars are highly coveted by all college cost centers. By connecting assessment to planning, assessment was brought to the forefront. In order to be eligible for action planning dollars, all programs were now required to present a summary of their assessment activities from the prior planning year. This summary focused on the use of assessment data to improve student learning. For the current planning cycle, programs were required to propose a measurable plan to improve student learning. During the following planning cycle, programs were required to report the results of their plan and consequent follow-up actions.

These changes in the strategic planning and action planning processes resulted in increased faculty interest in assessment and assisted in focusing assessment initiatives on outcomes and change rather than mere data collection. Additionally, tying assessment to the funding process reaffirmed, for faculty, the college's commitment to documenting improved student learning.

Local Efforts

☐ Education of Faculty

Assessment became an issue on our campus after the last NCA site visit in the early 1990s. Although programs had been engaged in assessment since that time, there were still faculty who had basic questions regarding assessment. Some faculty were not familiar with the basic elements of assessment (language, terminology, goals, etc.). To redress this lack of understanding, a series of informal informational meetings was set up to explain the basics of assessment. The meetings, which were not mandatory, presented practical examples to explain the assessment process, and examples were given to show how assessment could lead to improved student learning. These practical examples were essential as we, by design, shifted discussions away from the mechanics of assessment to the end result of improving student learning. Since our faculty values teaching and learning, they became more interested in the outcomes of assessment.

☐ Communication

As a supplement to the educational meetings, the theme of improving student learning was further strengthened by two other communication efforts. First, we changed the format and theme of our campus assessment newsletter. Instead of focusing on general assessment ideas, we invited faculty to submit teaching and assessment practices that had led to improved student learning. The result of the new focus was astounding. What had been a one-page general information newsletter, became a six-page letter filled with successful teaching and assessment ideas.

In addition to the newsletter revamping, we also instituted an annual end-of-year Assessment Fair. Staff and faculty from various programs volunteered to share assessment procedures, outcomes, and resulting improvements in learning with the rest of the faculty in a relaxed, fair-like atmosphere. Again the results were astounding. Although attendance was not mandatory, approximately 80 percent of the faculty attended the fair, and the discussions continued long after the fair was scheduled to end.

☐ Mentoring

While the educational meetings and the renewed communications efforts were designed for the faculty at large, the final efforts to increase faculty involvement were directed toward individuals. We established a mentoring program using faculty who had demonstrated a successful assessment track record. These faculty members made themselves available, when asked, to assist other faculty members with assessment issues and processes. The results of this effort have been very good as faculty feel free to have questions answered in a nonjudgmental environment.

Conclusions

The implementation of these global and local practices has increased the faculty's enthusiasm for, involvement in, and understanding and appreciation of the college's commitment to improved student learning via assessment. The result is that faculty are now concentrating not on the process of assessment, but on improving student learning--the proper focus of any assessment program.

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Adding Depth and Vision to the Assessment Process

Patricia M. Dwyer
Mark Stern

Introduction

Shepherd College had a significant problem, as have many other colleges and universities, with developing a strategy that would lead to a college-wide buy-in of assessment. Initially, the college faculty senate was given the charge to oversee the development of a college-wide assessment process, but little progress was made under this approach. Among the problems concerning the senate was the perception that assessment and evaluation of faculty were tied together. Many faculty felt that assessment was already taking place with student evaluation of courses and faculty evaluation of students through course grades. In addition, there was a concern that assessment could be used against faculty in annual evaluation or promotion and tenure processes. Finally, there was the concern that assessment activities consumed valuable faculty time and resources that could otherwise be put to better use. Thus, the meaning of authentic assessment of student learning, as well as the nonpunitive use of assessment, had to be communicated to the faculty before substantial progress could be made in the development of a college assessment program. Faculty had to buy in to the assessment process, and they had to develop an understanding that assessment was valuable for the improvement of student learning and teaching.

Under the auspices of the vice president for academic affairs and with the approval of the faculty senate, a college assessment task force was formed in the fall of 1998 to initiate and manage an overall campus assessment plan. Before this, individual committees had addressed assessment issues–the assessment committee of the faculty senate, a general studies committee–but coordination and communication were critical among all the components of campus dealing with assessment. The membership of the task force included representatives from faculty, staff, administration, and alumni; the purpose of the group was to lend broad-based support to assessment initiatives, keep all segments of campus aware of assessment activities, act as a resource, and help facilitate the assessment process. The task force developed a strategy for implementing an assessment process in several stages.

Phase I: Establishing a Workable Process and Formula for Implementing Assessment

The first stage included both gaining college-wide understanding of the concept of assessment and the adoption of a "formula" in which all departments and programs identified three learning outcomes that would be assessed each year. During this initial stage, a campus-wide assessment workshop was held to establish a basic understanding of such terms as *direct and indirect means of assessment, learning outcomes,* and *capstone courses.*

One major contribution to the development of a campus assessment plan was a workshop given in October 1998 by James and Karen Nichols, assessment experts with the firm Institutional Effectiveness Associate. They met with department leaders and academic support managers and staff to formulate a method for identifying student outcomes or administrative objectives. For each plan, assessment coordinators would first establish a link to the institutional mission. In the case of academic support units, a unit mission statement was also formulated. Each department or unit then established three student outcomes or administrative objectives that would be assessed during that particular academic year. For each outcome or objective, the department or support unit would determine two ways to assess success in achieving these goals. Groups were encouraged to include different forms of assessment–both direct and indirect indicators of learning. A criterion for success was established for each means of assessment–in other words, how success would be quantified. Thus, when data were collected from the assessment activities, the department or unit would have something to measure its results against.

During this first year of formal assessment, all academic support units and departments were expected to create, at a minimum, a first-year assessment plan. This plan demonstrated a link to the institutional mission statement and usually identified three outcomes that would be assessed that year. Departments and academic support units submitted plans to the college assessment coordinator in December; the coordinator then facilitated a process in which the task force members reviewed each plan and offered suggestions and/or recommendations for better clarity in the proposed unit or department plan. The role of the task force reviewers was not to give suggestions about particular outcomes, but rather to make recommendations that would help clarify the plan (e.g., Are three objectives identified? Are criteria for success established? etc.). In addition, the task force made recommendations about varying the means of assessment to ensure that direct indicators of learning were being utilized.

Preliminary plans were returned to departments and academic support units by February 1. During the rest of the spring semester, departments and units completed the assessment activities they identified in their plans. Over the summer, data were collected, and, in most cases, department and units discussed the results of assessment data and revised/maintained program components based on these results before the school year began in August. Completed plans (with all assessment results and program review based on results) were submitted to the college assessment coordinator and the respective division chair by September 30. Assessment plans also became part of the yearly review of each division.

Phase II: Building the Network Through Grassroots Education

Although the process for assessment throughout campus had been established, it was clear that there was still a great deal of resistance and misunderstanding about assessment throughout the campus in general. Thus, there was still a critical need to enhance faculty and staff understanding of the meaning and process of assessment. During this second phase, the assessment office initiated several faculty and staff development opportunities to develop a better understanding of the role assessment can play in improving teaching and learning. Regular meetings were held with department chairs and academic support managers to clarify information about the timeline and process for assessment plans and reports and to share information that would be helpful for all of the groups. One important component of these meetings was communicating among the departments the direct and indirect forms of assessment they were using and which strategies were effective. An outgrowth of these discussions were mini-workshops that focused on topics that would interest all departments: in spring 1999, a workshop on the capstone experience, and in fall 1999, a workshop explaining "primary trait analysis." Faculty members who had used these strategies effectively in their departmental assessment plans conducted the workshops. In addition, the assessment office sponsored a campus-wide workshop in October 1999. This workshop featured Doug Eder, an assessment specialist from Southern Illinois University. Three members of the assessment task force also attended the Indianapolis Assessment Institute in November 1999.

Student participation was critical to the success of the assessment program. In spring 1999 and spring 2000, the assessment coordinator attended student government meetings to inform students about the CAAP testing process (a state-mandated assessment initiative) and assessment in general. In the task force's second year of operation, a student interested in curriculum issues was asked to serve on the committee. In both 1999 and 2000, articles explaining assessment activities were included in the college newspaper, *The Picket*.

In the spring 2000 semester, the assessment office sponsored the first Student Achievement Day, in which students presented projects or papers to interested members of the campus community. The day was a great success, with several departments represented through student presentations. Presentations ranged from group projects from a Shakespeare class, to science lab experiments, to debate team exhibitions. Another such event is planned for spring 2001. Although these presentations were not used directly for program assessment, the fact that the assessment office sponsored and organized the event continued to make the connection for the campus between assessment and teaching/learning issues.

In spring 2000, the college also became involved in more intensive discussions about assessment through the campus-wide dissemination of Cecilia López's "Levels of Implementation." The levels themselves, and the discussions that resulted from the description of their characteristics, helped the programs and academic departments situate themselves within the continuum of implementation described in the new NCA document. Those at level one were urged to action; for those at level two, the concrete description of each level assisted them in seeing the positive impact assessment strategies could have. Through these grassroots exchanges, a new understanding of the importance of assessment implementation was growing and deepening.

Phase III: Shifting the Focus from Assessment to Student Learning

As departments and units gathered data, faculty and staff began using assessment findings for program review. Questions about the program's curriculum and the actual student learning that was demonstrated compelled departments to look more closely at the gaps in student learning and the changes needed in programs to address these areas. This juncture of the process was critical; while assessment per se did not always make sense to this faculty, they were, on the whole, very committed to teaching excellence and strong academic programs. Thus, in our third year, we replaced the campus-wide workshops with departmental retreats. Individual departments met with the college director for assessment of student learning at a site away from campus to discuss program learning goals. This time apart allowed departments to review assessment data for the year, clarify departmental learning goals, and examine courses that contribute to the goals. A template was designed to help departments more formally articulate program learning goals (in line with the institutional mission) and course review. During the retreats, departments identified the knowledge base, skills, and values they would want a graduate from their program to demonstrate. This then led to a discussion of where in the program these skills and content are taught, and how the department could assess these areas. These retreats also provided an opportunity for departments to informally discuss issues of teaching and learning. The off-campus site was comfortable, and the meals were funded by the assessment office.

In this same year, eight faculty and staff members attended an assessment conference sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) in Charlotte, North Carolina. Members of the team included the vice president for student affairs, a faculty member from the math department, the community college assessment coordinator, the chair of the general studies committee, a professor in the communications department, the president of the faculty senate, and the director for assessment of student learning. A campus newsletter was initiated during the summer to inform the college community about information gained at the AAHE workshop. The newsletter continues throughout the school year to keep everyone informed about assessment activities. In addition, a brochure with questions and answers about assessment of student learning was published.

Through the Office for Assessment of Student Learning, this core group of "assessment experts" started a speaker series entitled "Focus on Student Learning." These are breakfast or lunch gatherings in which one person who attended the conference presents one idea that he/she learned. The schedule of topics for 2000–2001 included use of portfolios for program assessment, student learning styles, ways that academic support units contribute to the learning process, learning communities, self-assessment as a teaching/learning strategy, and using focus groups in the classroom. In addition to the formal series, the assessment office sponsored a faculty panel discussion about portfolio assessment. Representatives from five different departments presented information about portfolio use in their programs' assessment plans. The group also represented a range from those at the initial stages of portfolio use to the veterans who had been using portfolio assessment for years.

During this phase, more effort was made to include students in the assessment process in a way that was meaningful. (Up to this point, students were included only by means of surveys or test-taking). A student satisfaction survey was administered in fall 2000 and was followed up with focus groups on issues of diversity that were facilitated by an outside consultant. This project was cosponsored by the Student Affairs Office and the Office for Assessment of Student Learning. A follow-up to the student satisfaction survey will also include a series of campus meetings to discuss the results and prioritize the issues that need attention.

Future Development and Conclusions

Plans are currently underway to integrate learning communities as an option for students taking general studies courses. Two groups will be piloted in fall 2001. Learning communities are formed when a cohort of students sign up for two or three linked courses. By sponsoring this initiative, the assessment office continues to underscore the connection between assessment and innovative teaching and learning.

Other innovations include a new funding format for assessment that involves mini-grants for innovative teaching and learning strategies. Before this, each department was allocated a certain amount of money for assessment activities. Some departments were eager to use money for assessment, but others weren't. In order to better use the budget funds this year, we have given departments a cut-off date to confirm the use of allocated funds. After this date, other departments/programs can compete through mini-grants for additional assessment monies. Also this year, the mission statement of the college was revised to include a statement about the importance of student learning. The latter change reflects the buy-in to the importance of assessment by the College Strategic Planning Committee:

> the small residential setting of the college creates an environment in which students are able to work closely with faculty, staff, and administrators who encourage their intellectual growth, personal fulfillment, and academic and professional excellence. Student learning is central to the culture of our institution, and finding ways to improve student learning is a continuing process. (from the Shepherd College mission statement)

The following statement of philosophy about assessment, linked to the institutional mission, was also approved by the task force in spring 2000:

Statement of Philosophy on the Assessment of Student Learning

- Promoting student learning is at the heart of every assessment initiative. Student learning is the common goal that drives every department and program.
- Assessment has the potential to promote an atmosphere of learning, cultural diversity, and curricular innovation.
- Assessment of student learning can build bridges between academic and student affairs, and between academic support programs and departments.
- Assessment results will be used to initiate or build service and academic programs and not for any punitive actions.

(statement approved by the Assessment Task Force, April 24, 2000)

There is no doubt that the faculty and staff are continuing to be educated about the meaning of authentic assessment. There is still debate by some on campus about whether assessment is just a passing fad, or whether it is a fundamental part of the educational process. As more departments and academic support units gather assessment data and experience the positive impact of assessment on their programs, it is more likely that the depth of the buy-in will continue to develop, with assessment becoming embedded within and facilitating the learning process.

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The Day After a Ten-Year Reaccreditation: Using the Levels of Implementation to Refocus and Reconnect Assessment

Ronald R. Dowe
Mary Mahony

What happens after an institution achieves–for the first time in its history–a ten-year reaccreditation? What if this affirmation comes fewer than three years after a focused visit on, among other issues, assessment and only two years after submission (finally and belatedly) of an assessment plan? Is there elation? Relief? Delight? Bewilderment? Complacency? Perhaps the answer is "all of the above." At Wayne County Community College, faculty faced just this set of circumstances last year. The college's assessment steering committee, noting the threats that potential complacency might have, found an unlikely ally in the NCA's newly published chapter reference, "The Levels of Implementation." Many other institutions may have also faced or will encounter a similar situation.

Background

Over the past ten years, assessment has assumed a major role in the North Central accreditation process. During this period, institutions struggled to develop plans to ensure the success of their students. Faculty began to look at the teaching/learning process in new ways. Missions, goals, measures, objectives: all were scrutinized and frequently revised. Eventually, however, it became necessary to assess the assessments. To aid in this process, North Central developed a rubric to aid institutions in their self-analysis; these were made available to a wide audience at the NCA Annual Meeting in April 2000, and "The Levels of Implementation: Patterns of Characteristics" has become an important tool for evaluating and understanding assessment progress.

Thus, over the past year, many institutions have been reevaluating their assessment progress using these levels, which provide a very informative overview of an institution's progress in embedding assessment into the campus culture. Using this evaluative process at Wayne County Community has allowed our faculty to focus on where we have been and where we plan to go. In addition, it has given our assessment committee a framework to refocus our assessment goals.

Our self-analysis involved several practical ways of utilizing these levels, many of which were described by Cecilia López at the April 2000 NCA Meeting. The one that is the major focus of this paper is "measuring institutional progress by comparing current characteristics with both those traits which characterized the institution in past years and with descriptions of the next higher level on the matrix."

The major area that this paper examines is "Institutional Culture: Mission and Collective/Shared Values." Reviewing the past problems of our institution is instructive. For many reasons, Wayne County Community College failed to recognize the necessity of developing an effective assessment program until 1996. In addition, our multi-campus site-based organizational structure, large part-time faculty, and ineffective communication system resulted in a diminished sense of the shared values that existed when our college was founded in 1969. Thus, the then newly formed assessment committee faced many problems both in clarifying our mission and ensuring that this vision was extended throughout the college community.[1]

Although we would not characterize it as such at the time—the "Levels of Implementation" had not yet been promulgated—our early efforts eventually managed to place us (somewhere) in level two in the assessment process by the time of our 1999 accreditation review. After a focused visit in February 1997, when very strict guidelines and requirements for submission of an acceptable assessment plan were imposed by NCA, these were some of the major steps that we took. First, we reviewed our mission, and the entire faculty adopted the "Philosophy of General Education." For the first time in the institution's history, faculty agreed upon a statement of how they believed that general education was reflected in the curriculum. This was an enormously important step in ensuring that faculty, administrators, and staff shared (we believed) the same goals and objectives. The next step involved developing core ability statements. These statements were necessary to operationalize the "Philosophy of General Education." They described expected competencies in communication, mathematical thought, application of the methods of science, diversity, and critical thinking, among others. Without such statements, a coherent assessment program would be impossible. Once again, faculty discussed and approved these statements in department meetings.

Next, we developed a course analysis survey to map the core abilities across the curriculum. Essential elements of this survey included documentation of each applicable core ability in the syllabus and the identification of varied types of assessment. In conjunction with this mapping, faculty assessment coordinators were leading department meetings in which department mission statements were developed. Syllabi were revised to reflect the departmental and institutional mission and the core abilities. Our institutional vocabulary was changing and assessment, measures, and student learning gained a new or renewed focus. We found that assessment afforded an extraordinary opportunity to improve collegial discussion and address longstanding issues of poor intra-institutional communication.

We had Come a Long Way!

At this point, we went through our accreditation review, receiving a ten-year continuation. Ironically, it was also at this point that we realized that we had to face an entirely new set of problems. While everyone at our institution was elated, too many faculty and staff had a sense of completion, even complacency. They tended to overlook the fact that while our progress had been truly significant, we still had much to accomplish. In fact, we were at the midpoint of our journey, not the end.

The Levels of Implementation

Fortunately, the newly published "Levels of Implementation" provided a method of review, a way of explaining that our philosophy must become a living document, subject to revision and change as both our institution and our insights changed. Thus, the assessment coordinators from each department began to review our accomplishments.

We began this as a group/committee process. After earlier distribution of the "Levels," faculty assessment coordinators, who make up the membership of our assessment steering committee, scored the level that they felt the institution had achieved on each of the institutional characteristics. We took these disparate scores and derived an average score reflecting the assessment of the faculty coordinators. As we began to compare our progress with the statements in the "Levels of Implementation," we recognized not only that that there was wide variation in scoring by the committee members, but also that we were able to focus more clearly on general weaknesses and challenges. We identified, for example, weaknesses both in our mapping process and in the interpretation many faculty members placed on the core abilities. All too often, faculty took the mapping process as either a challenge or a criticism; many wanted to do absolutely everything on the list. Definitions of assessment and descriptions of the measures were too vague. Eventually, in one of many assessment committee meetings devoted to this discussion, we realized that flaws in our core abilities statements caused these anomalies. In trying to be specific and cover every goal, we had ended up with a series of assertions that sounded very good, but in actuality meant little. Several of these statements were neither measurable nor reliable.

We realized that we had begun by attempting to fill a void when we developed the "Philosophy of General Education." We continued to try to fill that void by attempting to operationalize that declaration. We knew that something was missing. In fact, one of the steering committee members said, "Of course we have a philosophy of general education," in response to an assertion by NCA staff that it seemed that our faculty did not have such a philosophy. Our response—a statement of philosophy and an enumeration of more specific expectations—was appropriate but slightly off target.

Although our early efforts suggested that we had a shared set of expectations and values, our product merely repackaged our public face about what we normally give our students. Our response had actually skirted a more fundamental discussion of purpose and values.

Using the "Levels of Implementation" as a means to raise fundamental questions, we have taken the first step to recast our core abilities so that they become statements that provide a better and more coherent structure for our curriculum, one that reflects the core outcomes that we intend, not the reiteration of narrow and unconnected course objectives.

We discovered that there was actually another missing element–a shared vision for the college. In this continuing discussion, with insights derived from application of the levels of implementation, we also realized that a fundamental discussion of the values that undergird our curriculum and our teaching must also occur.

Shared Values

This exercise brought us to the question of values, a discussion that we realized should precede any discussion of shared vision. In this context, it may be useful to view values as how we intend to live, work, and act in reaching the future we describe. A vision may be quite clear and unambiguous; it may be strongly shared by all members of a community; it may even be compelling. But without values, a vision may not be worth achieving. The Third Reich was based on a very clear shared vision; its values, however, were monstrous.

How should we behave? How should we act? *Value* is derived from the Latin *valere,* to be strong. It has evolved to be associated with worthiness and valor. Thus, strong core values give strength and meaning to the vision we would describe in a new effort to join assessment and strategic planning. Values are behavioral statements. If we "act" as we "should," what would an outsider see us "doing"?

The words we use to describe our values reflect our personal mental models. As such, we decided that we shouldn't shy away from trying to identify a core set of values as a beginning place for the discussion of meaning. We began with a list of value statements and have proceeded to winnow these down to statements where we believe that we have, or should have, congruence.

Thus, the recent work of the assessment committee has been to address these issues and move our institution toward level three, "maturing stages of institutional improvement." We have adopted several strategies. One important activity involved a discussion of our institutional core values. The assessment committee began to explore those ideals that underlie our institutional behavior. These are the core values that we hold and that must be shared among students, faculty, administration, and trustees. This discussion was complemented by an administrative initiative to provide a new vision for the college's future. Two recent faculty organizations days (where all faculty are paid to participate) have been devoted to an analysis of who we are as an institution, what we believe in, and where we are going.

This has been augmented by a virtual classroom we established using the college's Blackboard.com® web site. (Guests are invited to preview the course at http://citweb2.wccc.edu, choosing "courses," then "faculty resources.") This course is open to participation by all faculty, both full- and part-time, with the assessment coordinators acting as instructors. A variety of discussion threads relating to the development of shared value statements is now ongoing.

The second step involves the revision our core abilities statements. Instead of what we had discovered were really unworkable statements, we decided to develop four meta-statements. The first three reflect our revised core abilities–think, value, and communicate–and the final one alludes to our set of assessment measures, act. Adopting this change recasts and clarifies our common general education outcomes and places the definition of specific goals, objectives, and measures back into the individual departments and programs. It forces a more accurate reflection of exactly what goes on in the teaching/learning process in each area. It helps describe general education in more meaningful ways than the traditional discipline- and course-specific statements common to institutions of higher education. (For example, "Upon completion of the curriculum, the student will ... recognize the relations between American and world cultures" or "identify the major ideas, events, and geopolitical factors that have shaped the contemporary world.") It enables us to evaluate assessment with far greater accuracy. The assessment committee can then, through its faculty coordinators, work to ensure that there is full coordination between the institutional and program or departmental mission. Thus, each department and program will be responsible for a far more accurate set of objectives and goals, which will allow the student to succeed and which will allow the institution to better measure educational effectiveness.

Another initiative involves the development of a template to connect student achievement in each course with success in meeting institutional and departmental core abilities. Including such a template across the institution will allow everyone–students, faculty, outside evaluators–to understand our goals and measure our success.

An additional method of communicating the institutional mission to all segments of our community is our assessment certification. The assessment committee created a checklist for individuals, departments, and the institution itself.

This allows instructors to ensure that their courses truly match the institutional guidelines for student success. Eventually, the assessment committee will publish a list showing how courses fulfill the institutional mission.

The checklist is extremely simple, yet enormously helpful for instructors.

Conclusion

We are a work in progress. Our achievements are significant, but we have much to accomplish. Our vocabulary has been enlarged to include the language of measurement and achievement; our sense of our responsibility for student achievement is being far more clearly defined. Still, we have much to accomplish.

There are some faculty, administrators, and staff who resist the idea of change. However, for those who embrace a philosophy of teaching that emphasizes student success and continuous assessment, an abundance of tools, workshops, and support have been made available.

We have come a long way.

Note

1. The reader is referred to a paper included in the 2000 Edition of *A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement* for more information on both the college's accreditation history and on how assessment became a tool for institutional self-improvement.

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Appendix

Wayne County Community College Assessment Certification Checklist

This is a draft of the checklist that has been designed as a voluntary mechanism for ensuring widespread adoption of assessment within teachers' normal practice.

√	Faculty Behavior/Action
☐	Identify in the course outline the operational skills/knowledge that students are expected to achieve.
☐	Construct tests that accurately reflect both the identified operational goals and the class time invested to achieve them.
☐	Solicit information on how students are progressing before tests.
☐	Share feedback with the class whenever information is solicited.
☐	Seek and compile student opinions on the adequacy and quality of tests and assignments. Share feedback.
☐	Seek data on how effective different classroom approaches work (projects, lectures, group tasks, etc.). Share feedback.
☐	Adjust teaching style according to student input.
☐	Share classroom practices that work with colleagues.
☐	Seek data your department/discipline needs to make sound, information-driven decisions.

Toward More Innovative Governance: A Model for Closing the Assessment Loop

Faye Gothard Mangrum
Theresa J. Hrncir

Educational improvement is a neverending loop that continuously cycles through various stages before returning to an original point, only to recycle through the stages yet again. Educational improvement begins with developing a plan of action, identifying progress of students' learning, implementing modifications to academic programs, and monitoring the effectiveness of the modifications through feedback. From the feedback and monitoring comes evaluation, which may lead to change and does lead to more implementation, feedback, and so forth. Needed changes in curriculum are discovered in the feedback and monitoring of academic program review (López, 1998). Assessment is not simply data collected and documented; instead, it is the changes and improvement that are made based on assessment data.

The rationales for this session at the 105th Annual Meeting of the North Central Association (NCA) are two-fold. One is to delineate the growth pattern of a governance system where faculty assumes a leadership role in institution-wide assessment. The other rationale is to provide examples of innovations tested at Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SOSU). This session will be a time for the presenters to share information about their institution's efforts to effectively assess its academic plans and programs through the Institutional Research and Assessment Committee (IRAC).

The Assessment Loop

☐ Planning

To accomplish educational improvement, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education seeks to ascertain that universities follow important Criteria for Accreditation. These criteria require that clearly stated purposes be established, appropriate to the mission and human resources of the institution. To determine whether these criteria are being met, the Commission looks for evidence of a governance system that provides dependable information to the institution's constituencies and accommodates their involvement in the decision-making processes. This shared governance system should allow all constituencies to have a voice in the decision-making of the institution, in particular, the planning processes. The *Addendum to the NCA Handbook* (2000) specifically states that assessment procedures should involve a variety of institutional constituencies and provide useful information for their planning processes (p. 4). At the 1998 Annual Meeting of the North Central Association, López provided a taxonomy of levels of implementation of the assessment initiative. She suggested that the first level of assessment include plans and objectives for conducting assessment activities to measure student learning.

☐ Assessment

◇ **First level.** The assessment portion of the loop should be viewed as having three levels or sections. According to López (1998), assessment evolves at different levels. During these levels, constituencies support assessment processes, collect data, and establish assessment cultures. The Commission states that the first level of assessment should involve gaining support of the university's constituencies for collecting data about the academic programs, especially support from the administration. The Commission asks evaluation teams to consider the institution's progress in assessment and to look for evolved or evolving shared understanding of the purposes of assessment *(Addendum to NCA Handbook,* 2000, p. 7).

- **Second level.** Level two of the assessment stage exists when student learning and assessment of student academic achievement are valued across the institution, departments, and programs. At this level, some academic programs have developed statements of purpose and educational goals that specifically mention the department's focus on improving student learning and the importance attributed to assessing student learning as a means to that end *(Addendum to NCA Handbook,* 2000, p. 8). Faculty have developed measurable objectives for each of the program's educational goals and takes responsibility for ensuring that measures of student learning are aligned with the program's educational goals and measurable objectives *(Addendum to NCA Handbook,* 2000, p. 9). Administration expresses understanding of the characteristics and value of assessment and promotes the use of assessment results to effect desired improvements in student learning and achievement *(Addendum to NCA Handbook,* 2000, p. 10).

- **Third level.** While the second level of assessment consists of a feedback process to ensure improvement of student learning, the third level involves the creation of a culture focused on student learning. According to Ott (1989), organizational culture consists of things such as shared values, beliefs, artifacts, and patterns of behavior. It is the unseen and unobservable forces behind seen and observable organizational activities (p. 1). Kilmann and associates (1985) state that "culture is to the organization what personality is to the individual—a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, and mobilization" (p. ix). At the third level of assessment, improving student learning has become an institutional priority, a way of life *(Addendum to NCA Handbook,* 2000, p. 8). Institutional statements include language indicating the high value the institution places on student learning (p. 8). Faculty speak publicly and informally to their peers and the institution's other constituents in support of the assessment program and educate others about its value (p. 9). Syllabi for each course state measurable objectives for student learning and provide for the assessment of student's academic achievement (p. 11). The institution publicly and regularly celebrates demonstrated student learning, performance, and achievement (p. 13).

Modification

Closing the loop actually begins with the modification phase of assessment. During this phase, changes in curriculum are a result of assessment data and are linked to academic program review (López, 1998). An important activity at this level is that effective feedback loops exist so that information about assessment results and attempted changes are shared with all institutional constituencies and are used to improve student learning *(Addendum to NCA Handbook,* 2000, p. 12). Another important activity that should occur at this level is that administration arranges for awards and public recognition to individuals and academic units making noteworthy progress *(Addendum to NCA Handbook,* 2000, p. 10). Most importantly, closing the loop means improved student learning. Williams and Shakiban (2000) argue that the key question of performance assessment is:

> "Can a student, toward the end of any degree program, demonstrate, through production (e.g., capstone paper, exhibition, presentation, or exam, etc.) the level of knowledge, skills, and values that is necessary to be considered a competent well-educated graduate in that program?" The asking and answering of this question should be a core component of an assessment plan for a major. (p. 180)

Evaluation

The final phase of the assessment loop is the evaluation phase, which directly leads to or recycles back to the planning stage. Mangrum and Mangrum (2000) contend that monitoring the effectiveness of the decision-making and implementation process is usually the phase of assessment that is neglected (p. 20). According to their research on shared governance models, a weakness exists at this level. For example, they discovered from a case study that structures for monitoring progress and decisions made by committees did not exist. While reports from one committee are passed to another (e.g., the assessment committee provides reports to the faculty senate), specific methods for monitoring the effectiveness of the shared governance process were not outlined by the university. Gollattscheck (1985) recommends involving all constituencies in constant monitoring in terms of where recommendations go, who handles them, and who is effective at it.

Action Plan to "Close the Loop"

This section of the paper provides a summary of interventions taken by the Institutional Research and Assessment Committee (IRAC) at Southeastern Oklahoma State University to overcome its assessment problems. This committee, consisting mostly of academicians, carries the university's primary responsibilities for all academic assessment programs and program review functions. The activities used by IRAC to engage the constituencies of SOSU include revising reporting documents, conferences, workshop retreat, and rewards for assessment reports. Before describing these activities, the next section will provide a brief history of assessment problems at SOSU. A rationale for the interventions as well as descriptions of them will then be outlined.

☐ Assessment Problems of SOSU

Southeastern Oklahoma State University is a regional university with primary emphasis on quality undergraduate education. The university's objectives are to provide programs of instruction in the arts and sciences, business, education and behavioral sciences, and technology that lead to baccalaureate degrees. The growth pattern of governance where faculty assumes a leadership role in institution-wide assessment has evolved dramatically in the last few years for SOSU. This evolution has come about for three reasons. The first reason described by Weiner and McMillan (2000) entails "changes that [are] necessary to move forward and meet the NCA mandate for shared-governance" (p. 300). The second reason was a change in administrative officers, with the current administration supporting faculty involvement in governance. The third reason is the enthusiasm generated within and by IRAC, the responsible committee. No institution is likely to succeed if either of the last two reasons is missing.

In the past, self-analysis of the problems related to assessment at SOSU has not been focused on academic programs, but rather it has been more focused on institutional management. Realizing the significance of this problem, the university has engaged in extensive self-analysis to discover weaknesses in academic programs. Faculty members found that formal decision processes are usually planned for and described in university documents, but in terms of implementation, this was not the case. They found the weakness began with the second phase of the assessment loop that consists of steps to implement the decisions made in the planning phase. For example, in the Self-Study Report (1998) written by SOSU, there is a flow chart explaining the steps of decision processes by listing inputs into the process, such as faculty senate charges, faculty initiatives, administrative requests, outputs such as administrative actions, faculty senate recommendations, and committee modifications. Of the ten levels of actions described in the flow chart, only the last level addresses implementation, and it simply states "implementation occurs exit process." (A copy of this flow chart will be available at the presentation and in the Resource Room of the 2001 NCA Annual Meeting).

Another problem addressed by IRAC concerned what shaped many departments' view of assessment—just another duty to be completed, checked-off, and ignored until the next due date. This problem is related to the third level of the assessment phase. The IRAC committee found that the institution does not show evidence of having a culture where faculty and administration engage in conversation about ways to use results of assessment efforts, and, in particular, they are not focused on improvements in student learning. Feedback from committees such as IRAC was filtered through the administrative process and lacked immediacy (and thus lacked effectiveness). This in turn led to a mismatch of feedback with subsequent reports and perhaps indirectly encouraged apathy about assessment measures and reporting. Therefore, the departments conducted little follow-up with the information discovered by the program assessments.

☐ Interventions

This following section of this paper focuses on several intervention projects conducted by IRAC. With changes in the administrative perspective of governance, the committee was allowed to create innovative changes through interventions. It developed several interventions as a way of changing from ineffective methods of accomplishing assessment to a better way in hopes of closing the loop. The purpose of the innovations and interventions was to identify barriers to program assessment and to encourage departments to implement changes based on the assessment reports.

The major issues of this session are growth and innovation. IRAC has been moving from working in a reactive mode to working in a proactive mode. It has moved from simply responding to administrative requests—checking-off one more item on the list—to addressing assessment problems, brainstorming, and looking for ways to improve student learning and the university's effectiveness. For Southeastern Oklahoma State University, the IRAC committee serves as a hub for the network of diverse programs and departments to promote the sharing of institutional assessment strategies. This committee is required to be the catalyst for growth and innovation. To accomplish these goals, IRAC began several interventions to assist the university in creating an assessment culture. These interventions include (1) revising reporting requirements, (2) engaging in conferences, (3) conducting a workshop, and (4) awarding effective assessment programs. The following sections describe each of the intervention strategies.

◇ **Intervention #1: Revised reporting requirements.** Even though the institution has officially been developing the assessment process for the last ten to fifteen years, the majority of changes have been made in the last four years. Three years ago, the role of the oversight committee was revised and elevated (Weiner and McMillan, 2000, p. 301). Two years ago, among other tasks, the committee reviewed and revised remedial education requirements and compared reports to plans. Last year, the committee began the process of comparing the reports with plans for continuity. However, it quickly became apparent that there were problems with the process. The committee realized that it needed to develop a new form with which to evaluate whether the department was attempting to close the loop. This involved comparing the report with the plan and then looking for evidence of growth or change in the departmental report. The form simply asked if these changes were evident in the departmental report. It also asked if changes had been made and if the changes had led to improvement in student learning. (A copy of this form will be available at the presentation and in the Resource Room of the 2001 NCA Annual Meeting).

Many of the departmental reports failed to show that any such feedback was taking place. However, there were probable explanations for this problem. The administrative form used to request a departmental report of progress on the plan was deficient. This form contained discrete spaces for answers. Departmental chairs and others who completed the form often filled the spaces and no more. Both the spacing and the requested information failed to allow for the feedback needed to close the loop on assessment. Some departments demonstrated knowledge of the entire process from plan to feedback to evaluation adjustment and so forth. However, the majority of reports were incomplete matches with the related plans. Either those who filed the report responded only to the exact request, or filled the space, mentally checked-off the task and ignored the purpose of the report. IRAC quickly realized that the administrative request needed to be revised. The ex officio administrator agreed and worked to change the request form. (A copy of this form also will be available at the presentation and in the Resource Room of the 2001 NCA Annual Meeting).

◇ **Intervention #2: Conferences.** In the 1999-2000 school year, IRAC also addressed another problem. Feedback from IRAC was filtered through the administrative process and lacked immediacy. To intervene, the committee conducted conferences with key people to identify barriers to program assessment, and to encourage them to implement changes based on the assessment reports. The chair of IRAC worked in cooperation with all campus academic deans to arrange a brief meeting with each department chair to discuss the developments in assessment campus-wide and to discuss the departmental report. Participants at the meetings included the respective departmental chair, the dean, the administrative ex officio member of IRAC, the IRAC chair, and the IRAC reviewers of the departmental report. The IRAC chair explained that these meetings were being held to share communication between departments and the committee. Meetings were also held to share, in general terms, what the committee had learned about the state of assessment campus-wide; to shorten the time from submission of report to feedback from IRAC; and to offer suggestions (or to receive them) that could assist the department. The ex officio member of IRAC discussed, in general terms, some qualitative measures that could be used to expand assessment. These meetings seemed to be viewed as helpful and worthwhile.

◇ **Intervention #3: Workshop.** Another engaging intervention project sponsored by IRAC included an all-day university-wide workshop held in an off-campus location. Lunch was provided to all participants. Events for the workshop include a presentation by a representative from the North Central Association, faculty from academic departments that submitted top program assessment reports, and activities designed by organizational communication and training and development professors from SOSU along with other members of IRAC. This workshop will be conducted before the presentation in April, so details will be provided in the presentation or in the Resource Room at 2001 NCA Annual Meeting.

◇ **Intervention #4: Award for top assessment report in a school or college.** Administration provided an additional amount of discretionary funding for the program reports that were judged by IRAC as the way to close the assessment loop. The department that received the award will share ideas with other departments during the Intervention Workshop. More details of these awards also will be provided at the 2001 NCA Annual Meeting.

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Sustaining a Culture of Assessment Via Collaboration

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Student outcomes assessment has been a major initiative in colleges across the country over the last decade. Institutions receiving accreditation from NCA have been diligent in implementing outcomes assessment not only to satisfy the NCA requirements, but also to focus on student learning outcomes and to increase accountability to their communities. In 1998, Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) had its ten-year accreditation visit and was granted continued accreditation by NCA with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years. However, a focused visit on student outcomes assessment (SOA) was required, primarily because of concerns about the breadth of buy-in throughout the college. Immediately following the news of the required focus visit, MATC's administration and the SOA committee met to strategize and "regroup." The committee was charged with realigning its efforts and devising a plan to shift the onus of responsibility from the SOA Committee to the entire college community. Thus began a two-year effort to more closely link the SOA initiatives to administrative activities, to the efforts of Institutional Planning and Quality, and to the expertise of the Institutional Research personnel. This collaboration has resulted in notable progress and an improved "culture of assessment" at MATC.

Milwaukee Area Technical College is a large, urban, two-year technical college with more than 60,000 students enrolled each year. There are four campuses across a two-county area of Southeastern Wisconsin. There are 107 associate degree programs offered, as well as College Parallel courses. Faculty number about 1300: 600 full time and 700 part time.

MATC has supported the assessment initiative in a number of ways. College-wide committees have been formed for Strategic Planning, Curriculum and Learning, and Student Outcomes Assessment. Release time for curriculum work has been made available; college-wide assessment days have been planned; faculty institutes have been developed; and opportunities for travel and conference attendance have also been made available, as has clerical support for revising courses.

The Student Outcomes Assessment Plan

MATC completed its first Student Outcomes Assessment Plan in 1994. Over the last six years, the plan has evolved and grown due to the efforts of the SOA Committee, changes in the nation's view of assessment, and as a result of administrative support within the College. MATC's initial efforts of outcomes assessment were focused on program outcomes and course-level learning. Although these foci have not been eliminated, the current plan is much more encompassing. The plan is cyclic and three-tiered: assessment at the course level, at the program level, and for the College's Core Abilities.

Course-level assessment is done as summative and formative evaluations of learning and to improve instruction. Program-level assessment focuses on broader learning outcomes as a culminating process for improvement of program offerings. The assessment of the General Education Outcomes/Core Abilities is conducted not only in the Liberal Arts areas, but also as part of each occupational program. Faculty members are responsible for assessment in each of these areas, sometimes as individuals and sometimes as colleagues in a program or a department. Multiple forms of assessment are used, depending on the data sought for specified outcomes.

Course-level assessment has two purposes: (1) to determine a "grade" for a course, and (2) to provide information that can lead to improved learning by determining which students have attained the stated expectations. A major change has been the college's endorsement of a competency-based curriculum model. Part of the assessment plan calls for the revision of all the college's 2000 courses into this format.

For each program at MATC, learning outcomes are being assessed with the intent of making improvements in the program, which will lead to enhanced student learning. After the outcomes have been established and assessed, the data collected are then analyzed, leading to decisions about learning, teaching, course sequencing, curriculum, and delivery. The outcomes assessment process for programs has been called "PTA^3"- which stands for Plan, Teach, Assess, Analyze, and Adjust (based on the Continuous Quality Improvement Cycle that has been adopted by MATC). SOA is an ongoing process that requires faculty to be involved in all the steps and activities, especially in the decision making activities that lead to changes in the curriculum and in classroom activities. It is through data analysis that faculty members can pinpoint areas of strength as well as areas that need improvement for program level learning.

To support the centrality of general education at MATC, the Core Abilities of the college are an integral component of each course, and student demonstration of these is determined through assessment in all programs. As with assessment of course competencies and program learning outcomes, numerous assessment tools are implemented.

Collaboration Efforts Leading to an Improved Culture of Assessment

An organization is more than a sum of its parts: it continuously grows and changes, and it requires symbiotic relationships among its parts. This interdependence and collaboration need to be cultivated. By linking and aligning the efforts of the Administration, the College's Core Committees (Student Outcomes Assessment, Curriculum and Learning, Strategic and Quality Planning Steering Committee, and Minority Student Participation and Retention Committee), Institutional Research, and Institutional Planning/Quality, MATC has been able make significant and supported changes in its effort to sustain a culture of assessment.

- **Administrative efforts.** Student Outcomes Assessment began as an initiative that was to be faculty-driven. Setting goals and outcomes, identifying and implementing assessment tools, analyzing the data from the tools and adjusting teaching and learning activities were logical steps that faculty members could take. However, the process is labor intensive, and making changes often requires administrative leadership and input. Initially, the SOA process was not readily taken on by the faculty. In fact, many seasoned instructors were hoping to wait out this new idea. Adding on another layer of assessment was not deemed beneficial by some of the people whose reality is the day-to-day interaction with students, not program outcomes or core abilities. The true wake-up call was the news of an impending focused visit on SOA. A directive from the college President and Vice President of Academic Affairs confirmed the fact that the faculty-driven initiative had to be supported and led by all administrators.

- **Quality/CQI.** The Center for Continuous Quality Improvement has been in existence since 1992 at MATC. The role of the Director has been to train college personnel on quality practices, provide facilitators to improve meetings and processes, and coordinate core committee activities. In addition, the Director provides guidance on effective strategic and quality planning models and practices. The strategic and operational planning processes have consolidated to include budgeting, human resources, technology, and institutional effectiveness to assure alignment and avoid duplication of effort.

  In the Strategic Plan, Student Outcomes Assessment objectives have been a critical part of the "Focus on Learning" Goal for the College. Since it is part of the long-range plan of the college, it is recognized as a key component of the future success of the college.

- **Support from the Department of Institutional Assessment, Research, and Development (IARD).** Just as assessment is a natural activity of instructors, evaluation is an activity of IARD. Typically, the efforts of these two entities ran parallel at MATC. As the SOA plan evolved, it was deemed necessary for the expertise of the people in IARD to benefit the activities of the faculty. Conversely, the types of evaluations done by IARD on programs should include faculty efforts in assessment and delivery. In 2000, the College hired a Research Manager with extensive experience in planning and assessment. With the additional resources, IARD was able to provide a renewed level of technical support to SOA activities. Among this support was the College's first systematic attempt to assess student achievement in the core abilities.

The Committee had established indicators or behaviors that show the attainment of these core abilities in 1999. The Committee then developed a rating instrument using a Likert-type scale and asked faculty to rate students and students to self-rate on the frequency with which students exhibited these behaviors. Two smaller programs were selected from each of the College's academic divisions for the pilot. Several measures were compared, including:

1. Comparison of faculty to student ratings overall and by program
2. Comparison between program faculty, to examine inter-rater reliability
3. Coefficient of reliability internal to the instrument (Cronbach's Alpha)
4. Ratings of the performance on the indicators themselves, overall and by program.

Preliminary conclusions suggest that the project was successful. Numerical measures were most heartening, especially considering that it was a pilot project. A group of faculty analyzed the feedback based on the pilot and made several recommendations to modify the instrument and the process, which were incorporated into a second assessment in spring semester 2000. Results are not available as of this writing.

Another area of support is a blind assessment of course-level assessment of the core abilities. Rubrics had been selected by department committees to analyze students' work to determine how the core abilities were taught and learned at the course level. In the fall 2000 semester, a double-blind evaluation system of student work was established, based on a random selection. This support has and will significantly streamline this process.

This year, the SOA Coordinator and the Research Manager have set out to determine the degree to which actual changes have occurred due to the efforts of the last six years. Just as the plan and its implementation are complex, so too is this evaluation. We are attempting to collect data to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does the organizational climate support quality, specifically for SOA?
- How engaged are the programs and departments in the SOA process?
- How are data collected and analyzed?
- What is the level and quality of collaboration in programs and departments for SOA?
- How are improvements identified and implemented based on data collection processes?
- How does the college support these change efforts?
- What are the long-range implications of the SOA efforts?

Throughout the school year, data have been collected from faculty, administrators, and students in the form of surveys, focus groups, interviews, and document analysis (assessment templates, divisional budgets, and minutes of meetings, for example). The analysis of these data is a priority for the research department, the Director of Planning, the SOA Committee, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs. As the culture of assessment at MATC continues, the efforts of the entire college community are pooled and focused on continuous improvement.

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Appendix

Sustaining a Culture of Assessment Via Collaboration

Goal

Developing and Sustaining a Culture That Supports Student Outcomes Assessment

Involvement

Administration

Increased accountability
Administrative evaluations
Divisional teams
Departmental meetings
Clerical support

Strategic Planning and Quality

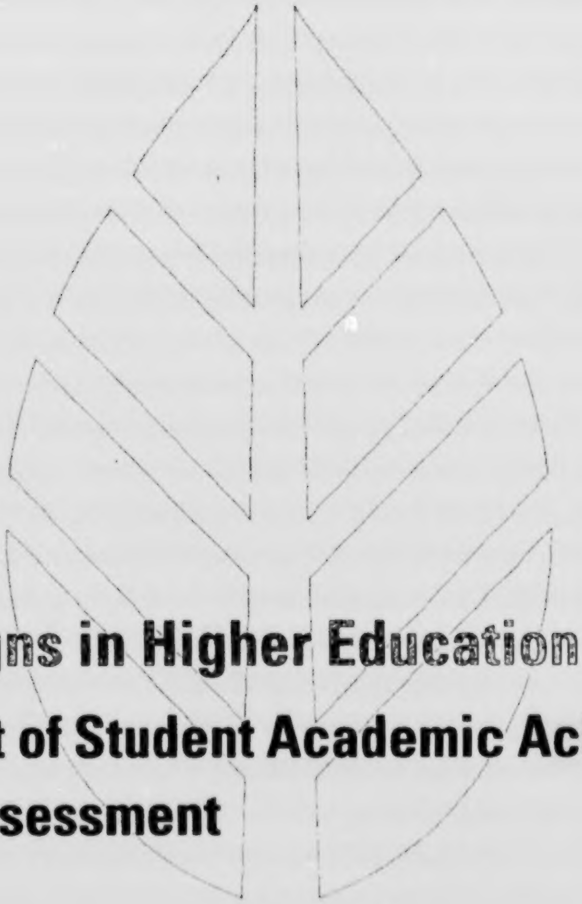
Stakeholders' meetings
Planning goals
College-wide reporting
Semester updates
Links to budgets

Student Outcomes Assessment Committee and Coordinator

Focus on building and enhancing a culture of assessment
Improved communications
Staff development

Institutional Research

Assistance in developing tools and analyzing data
Data collection and dispersion
Evaluation of assessment program



Chapter 10

New Designs in Higher Education

Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Tools for Assessment

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Twenty-Eight Right- and Left-Handed Tools for All Seasons: A Toolbox of Useful Items to Embed a Culture of Assessment in General Education, Discipline Level, and the Classroom

Russell J. Watson
Jan A. Geesaman
Peter T. Klassen
Ingrid L. Peternel

This paper, even as the presentation, will address a variety of tools that can be used in any institution to assist in its assessment efforts. College of DuPage has used many different approaches from a broad base to impact assessment at classroom, discipline, and general education levels. In addition, we have attempted to complete the feedback loop throughout the process. This paper will be divided into four segments, even as the toolbox presentation is divided. Each segment will develop a different layer of the College of DuPage assessment process.

Classroom Assessment

Tool #1: Our initial focus developed a system of reporting and documenting classroom assessment activity by our full- and part-time professors by using a feedback form that is submitted to the Classroom Assessment Coordinator, then published both in hard-copy as our "Linkages" document, and also on our web site. (Forms are distributed as a part of the toolbox package for the presentation.)

Tool #2: Classroom assessment has been the topic of a faculty in-service day, and agenda as well as Power Point slides are presented as a part of the toolbox documentation.

Tool #3: Our Teaching and Learning Center, a faculty resource system, has provided 50 copies of the Cross and Angelo book, Classroom Assessment Techniques, to be checked out by faculty and used as their own resource tool.

Tool #4: Each academic discipline has an Assessment Liaison person to help answer questions and provide resources for discipline members who have questions about classroom assessment issues.

Tool #5: In order to bring faculty up to speed in assessment processes, we wrote a faculty-development class on Classroom Assessment Techniques. The class was offered for semester-hour credit and included activities, assignments, and demonstration of assessment projects by the faculty participants. (Agenda for the class is included in the toolbox.)

Discipline-Level Assessment

Tool #6: At the discipline level, we began a system of assessment in multi-section courses in several areas. This involved faculty developing an agreed-upon set of assessment options, comparing data, and compiling a summary form to submit to the Discipline-Level Assessment Coordinator. These summaries are also published in hard-copy and on the web site. (Copies of a variety of discipline report forms are supplied in the toolbox.)

Tool #7: College of DuPage has an internal mini-grant system under the umbrella of the Innovation Incubator (I/I) program. This year the I/I is encouraging projects related to assessment and especially emphasizing improving reading skills in our students.

Tool #8: Several areas have developed a two-purpose tool in a pre-test/post-test design. This model is used in two ways: (1) to confirm appropriate placement in the class, and (2) to provide documentation of progress. Developmental writing classes and reading classes are successfully using this method, among others.

General Education Assessment

Tool #9: We implemented a general education assessment process using the ACT/CAAP instruments and a unique statistical model that has received national attention. In brief, we assess a random selection of entry-level classes each fall, and a random selection of exit-level and end-of-sequence classes each spring. Approximately 25 to 30 sections of classes are selected, enough to result in a finished sample of about 600 students, or 100 students taking one each of the six CAAP batteries. In each classroom randomly selected, all six ACT/CAAP batteries are given. Therefore, if an entry-level math class of 30 students is selected, five students will take the reading test; five students will take the science test; five will take mathematics; and five also will take the critical thinking, writing skills, and essay writing tests. Through a unique statistical regression and structural equation model (developed by Dr. Peter Klassen), we are able to compare scores of entry-level versus exit-level students without matched sets. (Background: The Student Outcomes Assessment Committee (SOAC) reviewed available assessments of general education. Through the SOAC's review, the faculty members endorsed the assessments as testing the things that we taught. This certified the connection of the assessments and instructional processes.)

Tool #10: A workbook was published to introduce the general education assessment process to the faculty. The workbook presented, the general education statement from the college catalog and separated it into seven general education outcomes. The general education skills tested in the CAAP tests were presented, and faculty were asked to relate these skills to success in their courses. Responses were summarized and distributed (on paper and via the web site) back to faculty. Thus the connection of general education outcomes with the assessment tools was established in the minds of those who need to accept it: the faculty.

Tool #11: We have published the results of the CAAP testing in two bound documents, also available on the web site. The summary documents have been of enormous benefit as we plan strategies for improving student success.

Tool #12: We have also published a colorful initial report on our CAAP results, along with an accompanying feedback form for faculty response. The Z-fold document was initially used to get information about assessment in front of the faculty in a visible way, and to encourage their response. All responses were then posted to our web site, and are there for the reader's review.

Tool #13: After the initial results of the general education CAAP assessments, we hosted a series of faculty forums to explore and discuss the results in more detail. (For future forums, we plan to entice a few more attendees with food offerings such as snacks or vegetable trays, etc.)

Resources for Faculty, Students, and the Community / Academy At Large

Tool #14: In order to get broad-based interest and support, a staff development workshop was designed with an outside speaker (Jeff Seybert) to help kick off our assessment efforts. The initial workshop went a long way in getting the original idea out, and in promoting the assessment initiative, especially at the classroom level.

Tool #15: Funding is always an issue, and usually begins on a shoestring. Our initial funding came by soliciting seed money from other committees to cover expenses for the initial CAAP testing. Once the value of that part of the initiative was established, funding gradually increased, resulting in line-item position within the college budget.

Tool #16: The development of a specific assessment web site was of enormous benefit to the college and the greater academy. The web site serves as a clearinghouse for information, feedback forms, papers, links to other web sites, and current news about assessment at College of DuPage. (The site is at www.cod.edu/outcomes.)

Tool #17: Our Assessment Plan had a workbook concept as a part of the roll-out of the plan. That workbook design assists in chronicling our assessment efforts, and serves as a guide for new faculty and administrators.

Tool #18: Motivation of faculty to participate in assessment activity means clear communication with the faculty about assessment processes. A newsletter is used for this purpose, published regularly and distributed to both full- and part-time faculty. (Copies of the newsletter are also included in the toolbox.)

Tool #19: Letters to faculty whose classes were randomly selected for ACT/CAAP testing have helped explain the purpose, and have helped encourage faculty to participate. At the date of printing this article, about 150 faculty have been involved, and only one refused to participate.

Tool #20: Students also need to be encouraged to participate and to do their best on the CAAP tests. A letter is addressed to the students involved, and a brochure is distributed to them in class prior to the CAAP session. We provide a $20 gift certificate to the college bookstore in a random drawing for every twentieth student who submits a valid answer document. In addition, those students who complete a valid answer document are given priority registration for the next quarter's classes. (Copies of the letter and student brochure are included in the toolkit.)

Tool #21: Perhaps the most visible of our tools is an assessment booklet published for the college and the community/academy at-large. The booklet describes the assessment process at the college, explains how it fits into the college organization, and clearly defines the responsibilities of faculty and administrators in the process.

Tool #22: Our student newspaper, The Courier, has emerged as an important communication vehicle to serve the students with assessment-related information. In our first round of CAAP testing, we learned that our students' reading scores were not as high as their skills in other CAAP areas. The Courier had a feature article on reading that explored the results of the CAAP tests and interviewed many students for their responses.

Tool #23: Perhaps this is an obvious tool, but we have attempted to engage the maximum number of faculty to attend the palette of various assessment conferences offered locally and nationally. This has provided a growing broad base of support and expertise in assessment.

Tool #24: Perhaps this is also an obvious tool, but in the beginning of our assessment efforts, visiting other institutions (both locally and a few more distant) was a helpful activity.

Tool #25: We have encouraged the colleges around our location (DuPage County, Illinois) to develop and participate in an annual Assessment Fair. This very local, one-day assessment conference allows for presentations similar to those on a national or regional scope to be available on a one-day basis for colleges in our area.

Unused but Useful Tools

Every toolbox has a tool or two that was purchased because we might need it someday. The following four items are in that category at College of DuPage. We think they are useful tools to pull out when needed, but they have not yet been tried at our institution. All of the other items have been used successfully.

Tool #26: An idea of producing buttons or badges that have an assessment logo or message is something that we have yet to use, but it may serve an appropriate purpose, perhaps useful for collecting feedback forms, or engaging participation in an assessment function.

Tool #26a: In the same genre of the buttons, but a bit more effort, is the idea of creating T-shirts with an assessment logo, design, or message. These could be given to those who have demonstrated a slightly higher commitment, perhaps on the completion of an assessment project or faculty development class.

Tool #27: The thermometer- or barometer-of-progress in an assessment initiative can be a visible way of documenting participation: assessment forms, participation in forums, etc.

Tool #28: An unused suggestion by a former committee member: An Assessment Party with hors d'oeuvres exclusively for those who have completed some portion of an assessment initiative. It was planned as a small price to pay to help generate goodwill and upbeat participation with assessment documentation, feedback, and follow-up.

Conclusion

Assessment is a process–a complex process that involves students, faculty, and administrators in exploring what they do, how well they do it, and what they could be doing better as each pursues amplifying student learning success. Because it is a complex process, tools need to be developed to address specific needs of constituents along the way. It is the intent of the presenters to provide as many tools as possible to help increase the probability of success for other institutions. Participants and readers are encouraged to visit our web site, which has many of the tools and resources for viewing and downloading (www.cod.edu/outcomes).

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New Designs for Linking Process to Outcomes: The Winona Assessment Project, Year Two

Susan Rickey Hatfield
Britt Yackey

> The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.
> —Albert Einstein

In the early 1990s, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, responding to increasing demands for accountability by the public and legislators, began to require assessment plans for all of their institutions. The 900 + colleges and universities of higher education accredited by NCA created assessment plans while the threat of losing accreditation hung in the balance. Many university administrators and faculty members comforted themselves with the belief that interest in assessment would diminish by the time of their next accreditation visit. Plans created were based in the best practice of the time, and largely limited to classroom-level assessment or broad-stroked university-level assessment based on existing data, process measures, irregular data collection, and convenience samples.

It has since become apparent that assessment as demanded by NCA and professional accrediting bodies (not to mention the public, granting agencies, and various elected public officials) has evolved into a more sophisticated requirement than can be met by most of the assessment plans submitted to NCA in the early 1990s. This evolution in thinking about assessment is evidenced by NCA's recently developed Levels of Implementation Matrix that outlines four criteria against which universities, colleges, and departments can benchmark their progress. The criteria identified in the matrix are (1) institutional culture (mission and collective values); (2) shared responsibility (faculty, students); (3) institutional support (structures and resources); and (4) efficacy of assessment. The characteristics identified in each of three levels of implementation (beginning stages, making progress, and maturing stages) not only help colleges or universities identify where they are, but also identify what additional steps or actions need to be taken to further their assessment initiatives.

Unfortunately, NCA's decade-long assessment initiative has not always resulted in a similar evolution of assessment practices on campuses. As it has become apparent that the push for assessment of student learning by the accrediting agencies is not going away, colleges and universities may need to reconsider their approach to it.

The Winona Assessment Project, funded in part by a five-year, $1.36 million U.S. Department of Education Title III grant, attempted to overcome the limitations of the current assessment practice on campus by developing an integrated database, World Wide Web-based assessment modules, and analytical templates allowing faculty anytime-access to assessment data. The goal of the project is to design and implement an integrated database that will (1) bring together the existing databases on campus; (2) allow the collection of assessment data in an ongoing, systematic manner; (3) create an analytical engine that will facilitate data analysis; (4) provide reports allowing for comparative analyses, trend analyses, predictive modeling, etc.; and (5) identify triggers for the development of appropriate interventions. The project, now in its second year, started with a rethinking of the current practice in assessment and identification of its limitations.

Rethinking Assessment

☐ Accreditation

The current assessment movement on most campuses can be directly attributed to pressure from the six regional accreditation agencies. Few universities have comprehensive assessment plans that do not ebb and flow with accreditation cycles (though NCA's AQIP initiative may help change that).

The pressure of mandated assessment is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it has forced colleges and universities to take assessment of student learning seriously. On the other hand, accreditation mandates can promote a sterile, mechanistic approach to assessment that generates little enthusiasm or excitement. Assessment can become a bland exercise in filling out forms and checking off requirements instead of a process that engages a university's collective creativity and imagination. Assessment programs that consist of bursts of assessment activity in the two years of the self-study are usually followed by a collective sigh of relief—and a return to business as usual—following the site team visit. There is no ongoing, systematic improvement as result of the data collected as assessment is the means to the end, not the beginning of the future.

In order to be effective, assessment needs to focus on improvement, not accreditation. Assessment will capture the energy of a campus only if it is seen as a genuine, sincere effort on the part of a university to improve itself through continual analysis, discussion, and innovation. Changes made as the result of assessment data need to be public, publicized, and assessed. Without a clear feedback loop and focus on institutional improvement, assessment will be a continuous uphill battle from which no one emerges better for the effort.

☐ Leadership

Assessment must be championed by the highest administrative officers on campus. Resources and support are essential to making assessment work, not just for collecting the data. What is needed is a deeper commitment of resources for studying the data and creating change. It is not an inexpensive undertaking.

While support of assessment at the administrative level is essential, assessment must become faculty driven, not administrator driven. Faculty must embrace assessment for the way it can provide information that can improve teaching and learning, promoting the scholarship of assessment. This will require faculty to shift focus away from thinking about assessment as a remote university exercise in evaluation to the recognition that faculty have the power and the responsibility to assess, adapt, and innovate on the classroom, curriculum, and program levels to maximize student learning. This is a leap of faith for faculty on many campuses who still harbor the fear that assessment data will be used in renewal, tenure, and promotion decisions. It also requires that access to timely, relevant data is readily available to faculty.

☐ Implementation

Universities can utilize a broad range of tools to assess student learning. Commercially or locally developed surveys and tests are part of most comprehensive assessment plans. These instruments, when used over time, provide a baseline from which the university can monitor progress or compare itself to national norms. But there is an inherent danger in locking into specific tools or methodologies, as they can limit the university's vision and horizon.

Assessment must be evolutionary, not method driven. Assessment activities need to be cumulative, building on each other, shaped by previously gained knowledge. The menu of assessment techniques and methods that a university utilizes needs to be both fluid and dynamic, evolving as data is triangulated to create information that forms the hypotheses that are then tested.

As new questions arise, new assessment techniques and methods are required. Continually measuring the same variables the same way may provide evidence of value added, but also may limit understanding of the issue. In assessment, there are no wrong answers, only questions that go unanswered because schools are locked into methodologies and tools without regard to how the data will shape knowledge. Universities become locked into comparing themselves against the past or against other universities instead of positioning themselves to the future and the good of their students.

☐ Data Collection

Many universities have responded to the assessment initiative by concentrating on the collection of data. Huge data warehouses have been created, with hundreds if not thousands of data elements. On many campuses, much of the data collected is never used. Colleges and universities need to focus on collecting data that have decision-making utility for the campus.

Institutions undertaking an assessment initiative should start with an examination of every piece of information that is currently collected from students and examine each question for its potential utility. If the question is vague, if it provides no clear information, if it does not help the university understand its students, if it has no foreseeable use as an independent or dependent variable, then collecting it is a waste of time. Many institutions could make great strides in their assessment initiatives by streamlining their data collection to include only those variables in which they can envision an analysis scenario.

☐ Data Storage

The problem of an overabundance of data is exacerbated by the inability to efficiently and effectively store data in a way that makes complex data analysis possible. At most universities, student data are stored in isolated data warehouses or silos, a separate one for each type of data (satisfaction surveys, admission data, graduating senior survey, standardized exams, etc.). These silos are often located in different offices throughout the campus (Admissions, Registrar's Office, Housing Office, Academic Affairs) and have no interconnectivity, as each database came online at different times and without universal data collection standards. Additionally, in efforts to maintain the integrity of the data by preserving the anonymity of the respondents, data cannot be linked together. Relationships between inputs, processes, and results go unexplored.

Data need to be connected in way that allows for the complex analysis between inputs, process, and outcome variables. Assessment is essentially an exploration of the dynamic relationships between data. Isolating data limits the ability to learn from the data.

☐ Context

Current assessment wisdom and practice promote the analysis of student cohorts against each other or against external benchmarks (for instance, first-year students' satisfaction compared to the satisfaction level of seniors, or the percentage of students graduating in four years as compared to the system's or legislatively identified target percentage). Though often collected in a systematic and efficient manner, these data are of limited utility in creating knowledge because they are removed from the individual student, and their richness has been lost. Assessment data need to be interpreted in relationship to student's goals, not cohorts or mandates. It is the relationship between the student and the data that creates knowledge. There is no knowledge inherent in the data themselves; knowledge can come only from the interpretation of the data in relation to the goals and background of individual students. For instance, rather than measuring an institution's success based on the percentage of students who graduate in four years, a more meaningful measure of success would be the percentage of students who graduated in four years who had intended to do so. Many students, because of obligations to their families, jobs, or simply personal choice, do not have four-year graduation as a personal goal. Using a static measure such as four-year graduation rates is unreasonable unless it is a student's goal to graduate in that time period.

Cohort analysis can still be valuable, but it is the student demographic data the define the cohort, not convenience of the institution, system, or legislature.

☐ Variables

An assessment initiative must be grounded in the university's mission, core values, and key processes. Colleges and universities need to measure what they value, and subsequently, value the measures. The danger lies in selecting and valuing measures, regardless of whether they are relevant to the core values and key processes of the institution. This is especially problematic for institutions using standardized exams and surveys. Though standardized instruments allow the opportunity to add items (sometimes as many as 20 or 30), many of the existing survey items are irrelevant to the specific institution, or stated too broadly to have any real information value or provide any direction to the institution. Though national comparative data are helpful, it is unclear how much of the data is genuinely helpful except for occasional publicity purposes. Many institutions could sharpen their assessment programs by designing their own instruments, rather than continuing to be both overwhelmed and limited by standardized data collection tools.

The Winona Assessment Project

To date, Winona State has identified the key variables needed to measure the achievement of the mission, core values, and key processes of the university. The variables have been identified in the existing databases and pulled into a separate read-only database that is updated bi-weekly. Online student assessment modules have been developed to measure key processes and are currently in the second stage of testing. Four analysis tools have been developed. Faculty and staff training on one of these tools has begun, with the other tools continuing to be tested and validated for training of faculty and staff late in the spring 2001. The assessment project will feature prominently in Winona State's evaluation visit in September 2001.

Summary

This project merges Winona State's assessment vision with a state-of-the-art technological solution. The anticipated result is a significant shift away from thinking about assessment as a periodic, isolated event precipitated by impending accreditation visits to a comprehensive, ongoing data collection, analysis, and information tool that will revolutionize the way Winona State practices assessment and facilities student success.

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Merging Assessment with Everyday Academia: A Universal Model That Works

James D. Evans

It is NCA's ideal to have each of its member schools reach a level of assessment maturity that makes assessment procedures "a part of everyday life" (López, 2000). Many colleges and universities are exhibiting steady progress toward that goal, but others are at an impasse for two reasons:

1. There is a troublesome perception that assessment requires faculty members to use out-of-the-ordinary measures—such as standardized tests—that cannot be easily worked into normal classroom activities.
2. Among NCA member schools, there is a clear preference for assessment methods that measure specific skills, processes, and competencies. Yet the majority of professors find it difficult to see how they might gauge student achievement along such dimensions (Lind, 2000). Simply put, they don't have enough measurement experience to translate their usual evaluation procedures into competencies assessments.

This paper (1) presents a universal method of assessment that uses the professor's normal course exams (and other evaluation techniques) as the foundation of the assessment program; (2) describes how to combine Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences with Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Processes to form a comprehensive assessment system; (3) describes specific techniques for implementing this assessment system within a number of different methods of testing and grading students; and (4) responds to the most frequent faculty objections to quantitative assessment of specific competencies within the context of college courses (see Knox and Knuesel, 2000). The NCA Annual Meeting session corresponding to this paper will provide empirical examples of the application of this system at a mid-sized university; describe how the system has been used to improve course delivery; and outline a plan for training an entire faculty in the implementation of this approach.

The Course Profile Concept

The competencies-oriented assessment device I wish to suggest is built upon a combination of Bloom's (1956) six cognitive operations—Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation—and Gardner's (1993) expressive modalities, as shown in Competencies Matrix 1. Gardner identified eight expressive modalities that he considers to be distinctly different "intelligences":

Linguistic: use of words to express knowledge and reasoning
Musical: expression through sensitivity to pitch and rhythm
Mathematical-logical: use of symbols and formal logic in reasoning
Spatial reasoning: expression of knowledge and reasoning concerning the relative positions and orientations of objects in space
Movement or bodily-kinesthetic: psychomotor conceptualization and expression
Interpersonal: expression of interpersonal sensitivity and inference
Intrapersonal: sensitivity to one's own emotions, moods, and motives; self-understanding
Naturalist: ability to identify and classify patterns in nature

A complete college curriculum includes learning and training along most of these expressive dimensions. When these dimensions are combined in all possible ways with Bloom's six cognitive skills, it is not difficult to conceive of a formal assessment model that reflects the great diversity of interests and outcomes normally observed in a college-student population. Thus, each cell of Matrix 1 represents the combination of a particular competency and a particular mode of expressing that competency.

Competencies Matrices 2 and 3 illustrate how the "expressive-modality/competency" profiles of typical courses might differ from one course to another. In practice, any college course can be profiled in such a fashion. "High," "Medium," and "Low" stand for high, medium, and low emphasis of the modality/competency combination. A blank cell means that the particular combination is not substantially present in the course.

Under the assessment system described here:

- Every general education course and major core course is profiled within this expressive-modalities/competencies matrix, using the course's final exam, final project, or final product as a course-profiling guide.
- Every year, each of the profiled courses is assessed for the level of student achievement in each of the modality/competency areas of medium and high emphasis.
- The level of student achievement in each of the modality/competency areas of medium and high emphasis will be tracked from year to year.
- Results of student-performance tracking will lead to changes in teaching strategies to increase the level of student achievement in modality/competency areas that are deficient—that is, that show lower-than-acceptable achievement.

Competencies Matrix 1

Expressive Modality	Competency						
	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation	Other
Linguistic							
Musical							
Mathematical-Logical							
Spatial							
Bodily-Kinesthetic							
Interpersonal							
Intrapersonal							
Naturalist							
Other							

Competencies Matrix 2: Example of a Course Profile for a Typical College Course

Expressive Modality	Competency						
	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation	Other
Linguistic	Medium	High	High	Low	Medium	Low	
Musical							
Mathematical-Logical	Medium	Medium	Medium				
Spatial							
Bodily-Kinesthetic							
Interpersonal			High	Medium	Medium		
Intrapersonal			High				
Naturalist							
Other							

Competencies Matrix 3: Second Example of a Course Profile for a Course Emphasizing Higher Skills

Expressive Modality	**Competency**						
	Knowledge	**Comprehension**	**Application**	**Analysis**	**Synthesis**	**Evaluation**	**Other**
Linguistic	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	Low	
Musical							
Mathematical-Logical	Low	Medium	High	High	High	High	
Spatial							
Bodily-Kinesthetic							
Interpersonal	Low	Medium	Medium	High	High		
Intrapersonal	Low		Medium	High			
Naturalist							
Other							

As will be made evident later in this paper, the assessment system discussed here has several distinct advantages over the systems used at many colleges and universities:

- It is extremely easy to conduct assessment analyses using this system, because the methodology asks professors to work with procedures and information they ordinarily use in their classes.
- This approach has content validity because it links assessment directly to course learning objectives, target skills and knowledge, and relevant within-course evaluation procedures.
- The universal ease of implementation means that a school that uses this approach will have a uniform and meaningful cross-curriculum method for carrying out a comprehensive assessment program.
- Many of the assessment devices employed in higher education either yield only very general outcome data—for example, "32 percent of our students made As in their senior-level courses" (what does that tell us?)—or tend to be based on subjective impressions or anecdotes. In contrast, the methodology described here yields quantitative indicators of the degree to which students can demonstrate specific skills and processes in pivotal courses.

Implementing the Device

This approach to assessment can be implemented most conveniently in courses that involve comprehensive final exams. However, creative professors will also be able to make this system work well with semi-comprehensive finals (covering the second half of the course), the combination of a unit final with one or two other unit exams, projects and performances, or research reports and term papers.

☐ Start with the Final Exam

Let's take the most straightforward situation. Assume that an instructor administers a comprehensive final test assessing the students' mastery of the most important course material and competencies. Of course, the primary purposes of such an exam are to ascertain the degree to which the students have learned the subject matter and to help determine what grades they should receive. But, for assessment purposes, there is much more that one can do with the final. The nature of the exam questions provides information necessary for profiling the competencies and modalities considered most important in the course, and the results of the exam gauge the level of mastery of these critical skills.

Why the final exam? In many, if not most, courses, the final exam contains questions that reflect the material and skills that the instructor hopes to have taught and developed throughout the entire course. The main assumption of this approach is that the final exam questions assess attainment of the most central learning objectives. Indeed, the content of the final is often the best indicator of what competencies have been promoted in a course.

☐ The General Procedure

The assessment procedure follows these steps:

1. Within any course selected for profiling, the instructor analyzes each test question on the final exam (or every measurable aspect of a final paper or project) within the framework of the Bloom/Gardner matrix illustrated earlier. That is, each question should fit primarily within one cell of the expressive-modalities/competencies table. A question (or measurable aspect of a paper or project) that reflects more than one competency or expressive modality should be classified according to its most important or salient competency/modality combination. Some long-answer essay questions can be subdivided into several cells of the matrix. (See the later discussion of this matter.)
2. If a question (or measurable aspect of a paper or project) has content that emphasizes competencies or expressive modalities not included in the table, the instructor can use the "other" dimension provided and specify the unique skill or modality.
3. Based on this analysis of question types, the instructor then completes a formal profiling of the course as exemplified by the matrices shown earlier.
4. The instructor "competency-grades" the exam (or paper or project) to ascertain the percent success rate for each competency/expressive-modality combination featured in the course.
5. Finaly, the instructor prepares a competency-attainment table or chart for assessment-reporting purposes. These tables and charts serve as relatively precise devices for year-to-year tracking of student success along various dimensions of competency. Their content directly identifies the teaching/learning areas in which course-delivery strategies and tactics need to be improved.

☐ Specific Methods

The particular method necessary for converting students' performance on exams and papers to "percent success rate" will vary from one grading system to another. This section details how several often-used approaches to evaluating students can be adapted to the general procedure.

- ◇ **Objective exams.** Objective exams include those that use true-false, multiple-choice, matching, and (to a lesser degree) completion (fill-in-the-blank) test questions. With such tests, specific sets of items are identified with particular cells in the expressive-modalities/competencies matrix. Each set of items is then competency-scored by finding the average percent correct in that set through (number of items correct/number of items in the set) x 100. The resulting number is the *percent success rate* for the corresponding modality/competency cell. Suppose, for example, that a multiple-choice test has six questions that measure application of verbal concepts. That is, they represent the Linguistic/Application cell. Each student receives a percent correct score for those six items. The average percent correct for those six questions across the whole class is the percent success rate for application of linguistic concepts in the course. The same test might have eight questions that assess logical analysis. That is, they represent the Mathematical-Logical/Analysis cell. The class's average percent correct on that set of items is the percent success rate for logical analysis, and so on for each modality/competency combination represented on the test.

- ◇ **Essay exams.** Some professors might have trouble determining how to apply this assessment system to essay exams, since such tests can be scored in various ways. Also, a long-answer essay question might require the student to make major use of more than one modality/competency combination. This section will briefly address these issues.

  - ○ *Points awarded per question.* If the instructor awards a certain number of points relative to a predetermined number of possible points for each essay question, then each student's percent correct for that question is simply (points earned/possible points) x 100. These are averaged across students to get the percent success rate"for the modality/competency cell represented by the question. If two or more essay questions fall into the same cell, their percent success rates can be averaged to arrive at an overall rate for the modality/competency combination.

  - ○ *Letter grade per question.* Some instructors do not use points to evaluate essay responses. Rather, each question gets a letter grade: A, B, C, D, or F. In this case, the instructor should define what he or she considers an acceptable grade—let's suppose that that is a grade of C. In this case, percent success rate of the modality/competency combination represented by the question is the percent of the class getting a C or better grade on the question.

- *Pass/fail per question.* Sometimes an instructor has a pass/fail criterion for each test question, and uses neither points nor letter grades to evaluate students' responses. In such a grading method, the percent success rate for the modality/competency cell corresponding to each question is simply the percent of students who receive "pass" on the question.

- *Qualitative grading categories.* If a professor uses qualitative labels, but not letter grades, to express evaluation of an essay response–excellent, good, adequate, inadequate, for example–the item assessment situation can be handled in the same way as that described for a letter-grade method.

- *Question of which skill is measured.* Most test questions tap more than one competency. For instance, an item asking a student to "Compare and contrast the process of operant conditioning and Darwin's survival of the fittest notion" requires the student to exercise basic content knowledge, comprehension of concepts, and analysis and synthesis. Logical processes are necessary, but so is linguistic expression. How do we categorize such multidimensional test questions within the expressive-modalities/competencies matrix? There are at least two ways to handle this, and which solution is chosen depends, in part, on whether the question is in objective or essay format:

    1. The instructor should ask, "Which skill is most important in the question?" That is, what competency was the instructor trying to tap when he or she wrote the question? Alternatively, the instructor could ask which competency is likely to be the strongest determiner of the student's success in responding to the question. The answer to one of these queries will lead to a reasonable matrix classification of the test item. This solution would work especially well for objective exams, but it could also be applied to short-answer essay tests.

    2. If the multidimensional test item at issue is a long-answer essay item that prominently taps two or more modality/competency combinations, it might be necessary and desirable to grade the question in two or more segments. For example, the test item might ask the student to "describe and evaluate" something. Separate percent success rates could be developed for the skill of basic knowledge acquisition (the describing part) and the skill of evaluation, respectively.

◇ **Courses with multiple instructors.** Different professors teaching the same course might administer different final exam questions and have overlapping, but somewhat different, expressive-modalities/competencies profiles. Does this partial differentiation pose a problem for the assessment procedure advocated here? Potentially, yes. But the problem can be overcome easily if the professors in question are willing to work together on the development of the assessment data. The faculty members start by sharing their course profiles based on their respective final exams or projects. For modality/competency cells for which both (or all) have data, they would average their percent success rates. Any percent success rates for cells unique to particular professors would be reported intact; no averaging would be necessary.

Another approach to the individuality-of-content problem that is especially applicable to general education courses would involve a collaborative effort among all the instructors of a particular course to develop common objectives and final exams. The advantage of this option is that it would induce faculty members to think about and debate what they think is most important for students to learn.

◇ **Papers and journals.** Some courses do not require students to take exams. Often a major paper or project is assigned and used to evaluate the degree of learning that has taken place. Papers can be graded according to many competency criteria, such as accuracy and completeness of content (basic knowledge), abstractness of expression (comprehension), thoughtfulness (analysis), organization and clarity of expression (synthesis), and critical thinking (evaluation).

One also finds it easy to imagine assessing journal entries modality/skill combinations such as interpersonal analysis, intrapersonal applications, logical evaluation, and so on.

Likewise, each student in a participation-type class can be classified as below average, average, or above average on any modality/skill combination that is emphasized in class discussions and activities. Percent success rate is figured on the basis of the percent of the class receiving average or above average ratings on each combination.

◇ **Performances.** Certain courses in Performing Arts and Communications involve the evaluation of various aspects of psychomotor competence as part of the grading process. The student is rated and/or graded on knowledge, application, synthesis, and evaluation in the musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal modalities. The initial assessment task in such courses is for the instructor to develop an explicit list of the modality/competency combinations that he or she considers most prominently in evaluating students' performances. Then it becomes a matter of deciding what constitutes an acceptable level of performance and determining the percentage of students reaching this level for each modality/competency cell considered.

☐ Possible Objections to the System

◇ **The question of academic freedom.** One of the misgivings professors have about competency-based assessment is that such an orthodoxy forces them to teach certain competencies. It does not. It merely asks professors to identify the competencies and expressive modalities that they choose to emphasize in their courses and then assess the degree to which their students exhibit learning along the chosen dimensions. This system does assume that we all know what skills and expressive modalities we are trying to develop in our students, and that we can identify different degrees of these operations in our students' performance. But that is practically a universal assumption in academia. In fact, any argument in behalf of academic freedom and responsibility must make this assumption.

◇ **Reluctance to replace present assessment methods.** Some faculty members will feel threatened by this idea, thinking that they already have a good assessment program and that it will be displaced by the new system. Replacement isn't necessary. All that is useful in existing methodologies certainly can be retained, and the approach advocated here can initially be used as a more specific supplemental method. I anticipate, however, that many disciplines will find the new methodology more incisive, and they might decide to discard their present procedures.

◇ **Inability to identify skills assessed in course.** An objection we are likely to hear is that the skills and expressive modalities identified here are not relevant to a certain professor's courses, that these things just aren't what he or she teaches. Given the breadth of behavior and intellectual operations covered by the present model, such an assertion is dubious. Perhaps some instructors will need to consult with colleagues to link the appropriate labels with their exams, projects, and performances. Faculty workshops on assessment might also help resolve such problems of modality and skill identification. In the improbable event that someone's target teaching/learning objectives actually do fall outside this comprehensive model, the modality/competency matrix does contain "Other" categories to accommodate variations.

Conclusion

The Course Profile approach to assessment is a universal method of gauging student achievement in two respects. First, it uses descriptive and measurement dimensions that cover virtually the full range of performance possibilities for human beings. Any competencies and intelligences not included in the standard categories can be specified and defined for particular disciplines under the "Other" rubric. Second, the approach requires only that professors express their normal methods of assessing students, and the results of those trials, in terms of identifiable competencies and intelligences. Thus, it is relatively painless, yet informative, to recast everyday measurement of student achievement within a framework of competencies/intelligences assessment. And since the instruments used are the professor's usual tests and classroom-evaluation procedures, implications for changing teaching methods to enhance development of particular competencies and talents should be easy to see and act on.

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Using Cross-Functional Teams to Develop an Electronic Portfolio to Assess Technical and General Education Outcomes

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Student Portfolio Assessment

As a part of building a comprehensive academic assessment program at St. Paul Technical College, many forms of direct and indirect measures of student learning are being utilized. The overarching purpose of the assessment program is to continuously improve teaching and learning. Programs utilize many forms of traditional assessment measures, including written tests such as true-false exams, multiple-choice tests, and essay exams. Faculty are encouraged to utilize "non-test" measures, including case studies, projects, product simulations, and internship checklists. A recent innovation in measuring student learning is occurring through the use of portfolio assessment to demonstrate attainment of global and technical skills.

According to Larson et al. (2000), student portfolios are particularly useful in and appropriate for the assessment of student learning in the technical college environment. Portfolio development is an alternative form of assessment that includes the assessment of active learning and performance rather than a focus on memorized facts. This is applicable to business and industry as well by building a connection between classroom learning and the world beyond school. The successful achievement of outcomes, however, depends on the purposes, practices, and protocols that guide the implementation of portfolio assessment.

Portfolios have been used as a way for architects, engineers, and other professionals to illustrate their technical and global skill attainment and apply knowledge to practice. With colleges' increasing emphasis on performance standards, student-centered classrooms, and accountability, the portfolio has become a collection of work samples. As an assessment tool, the portfolio should reflect the breath of study of the curriculum and the quality of work that students are expected to produce (Borthwick, 1995).

Developing Student Portfolio Protocols Using Cross-Functional Teams

Various forms of traditional portfolios have been used by St. Paul Technical College faculty in programs such as graphic design, human resources, and computer careers. Generally, the traditional portfolio has consisted of a resumé and examples of student assignments. Due to the potential value of using student portfolios to assess technical and global outcomes, St. Paul Technical College explored ways to enhance the portfolio process, expand the use of portfolios across programs, and utilize innovative approaches to engage students in learning and assessment processes.

It was recognized that a cross-functional team would provide a mechanism for experts from across the college to come together and share valuable expertise. A cross-functional team consisting of technical and general education faculty, an academic dean, an instructional technologist, a curriculum specialist, and the assessment coordinator was formed to examine ways to enhance student portfolios and the assessment of program outcomes. The project leader helped facilitate the team's purposes, roles, strategies, processes, feedback, and interfaces. The work plan was organized around the expertise of team members and the development of the portfolio components.

The cross-functional team utilized assessment protocols recommended by López (1996) to examine portfolio components and assessment measures to specify what the portfolio should include and how it should be assessed, by whom, and at what time intervals. The emphasis was on building a process for technical and general education faculty to collaborate on assessing technical and global outcomes through the use of assessment rubrics. A portfolio development course was designed to be team-taught by general and technical education faculty using multiple assessment measures of student learning.

College-wide assessment measures for general education were established, and rubrics with specified criteria were developed. According to López (1996), "Evaluators observe that the use of student portfolios to measure student learning is found effective by academic units that utilize them. They urge academic departments that use portfolios for assessment purposes to provide evaluation protocols in departmental assessment program documents as to how the portfolios are to be reviewed" (p. 13).

An important priority of the cross-functional team was to offer students a traditional as well as an electronic option in the development of portfolios. Once the assignments and assessment protocols were established, the team worked extensively to provide a college-wide process for the electronic portfolio option. This required all members of the team to utilize their expertise to offer students with a wide variety of technology skills a means of documenting their achievements electronically. Technology procedures and resources were developed to provide students with options to use digital cameras, camcorders, scanners, and electronic file transfer. In addition, a process was established for students to document and demonstrate their technical and global skills through the use of video clips of oral presentations, recorded narratives, writing samples, and resumés.

Benefits and Issues of Implementing Student Portfolio Assignment and Assessment Protocols

Student portfolios extend the basis of assessment beyond traditional forms, such as multiple-choice tests, to the alternative assessment of active learning based on clearly defined standards (Willis, 1996). Portfolio assessment provides instructors and students with multiple ways to diagnosis students' strengths and weaknesses to help them improve their performance (Borthwick, 1995). When portfolio criteria are linked to program outcomes and provide students with clear expectations of technical and global skill requirements, they are an effective tool for helping students "see gaps in their learning, determine strategies that support their learning, celebrate risk taking and inquiry, set goals for future experiences, and see change and development over time" (Porter and Cleland, 1995, p. 23).

Portfolios also offer the benefit of engaging students in the learning process. Portfolio assessment is not instructor-directed, as are many other forms of conventional assessment processes. The portfolio process supports student-centered classrooms and a shared responsibility for assessment. The very nature of the portfolio assessment process involves students, instructors, and employers in establishing the criteria and content of the portfolio. It facilitates student involvement in and monitoring of learning and the documentation of progress and achievements over time.

The portfolio process has the potential of engaging students as active learners throughout the educational process. A recognized value of portfolio assessment is that the process can accommodate the diverse learning styles of students and enable them to realize and experience success.

Some of the issues regarding the difficulty of using portfolio assessment are related to reliability as a part of assessment protocols (Stecher et al., 1996). Problems in scoring result from vague assignments and assessment specifications. For this reason St. Paul Technical College spent a significant amount of time developing recommended assignment and assessment protocols. Also of significance is the need for instructors to receive in-service on the portfolio assessment process and to be integral in all phases of the development process. It is important for students to be oriented to the portfolio process, components, assignments, and assessment. To be effective, assessment protocols must be established and utilized, including how assignments will be assessed, by whom, and at what time intervals. Clearly established assignment and assessment protocols are imperative. The technical and practical issues of portfolio assessment challenge educators to collaborate with other instructors on an ongoing basis and to involve students as active learners.

Reflections on the Student Portfolio Development Process

Due to the complexity of building a college-wide portfolio process to document and assess technical and global outcomes and expand the use of portfolio options for students, a cross-functional team was utilized at St. Paul Technical College. The team was successful in achieving intended outcomes and developing traditional as well as electronic portfolio options for students. The cross-functional team achieved these goals by providing a mechanism for experts to come together and share valuable expertise. The work plan was facilitated by a team leader and organized around the expertise of team members and the development of the portfolio components.

This approach will continue to be utilized at St. Paul Technical College for curricular and assessment initiatives due to the rich experience and well-received outcomes of the portfolio project. As colleges utilize technology in teaching and learning, an increasing number of cross-functional teams will be of value involving technology experts, faculty, instructional design specialists, and administrators to achieve results.

According to O'Banion (1997), technology will continue to transform learning opportunities. Cross-functional teams serve as an important resource for technology imperatives across the college curriculum as experts come together to create innovative educational opportunities. Further, the use of cross-functional teams helps build *esprit de corps* across college personnel and new designs in teaching and learning.

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Promise and Pitfalls of Electronic Portfolios: Lessons Learned from Experience

Gloria M. Rogers
Julia Williams

Introduction

A portfolio is a "purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and/or achievements. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection."[1] There is no one correct way to design a portfolio. The design should be driven by a clear understanding of the desired outcome from using portfolios and the knowledge and skills to be assessed. How the portfolio will be used will determine the design and focus of the portfolio development. Portfolios are not an end in themselves and must be developed with a clear vision of the desired outcome.[2]

Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of institutions using portfolios as a means to document and assess student work.[3] Many institutions have capitalized on the use of technology to create a more efficient portfolio process. Based on four years of experience developing and using portfolios at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, the decision to use portfolios in an electronic format is described. Based on the experience of implementation, both the promise and pitfalls of electronic portfolio use are discussed.

Rose-Hulman Assessment Plan

The Commission on the Assessment of Student Outcomes (CASO) was charged with developing an institutional assessment plan to provide information for quality improvement and satisfy the needs of external accrediting agencies. Student learning outcomes represent a significant portion of the assessment plan. Much of the development of the plan occurred in the summer of 1997. At that time, a subteam of CASO devoted particular attention to student outcomes assessment for the plan. The goal for student outcomes is to instill in our graduates the skills appropriate to their professions and lifelong learning. There are nine objectives that further specify these skills: ethics, teams, communication, global awareness, experiments, design, engineering practice, interpreting data, and contemporary issues. Each of these skills has multiple, measurable, specific performance criteria that define the skill.

Faculty researched various data collection methods that could be implemented. These methods included course grades, questionnaires and surveys, standardized tests, qualitative methods, and portfolios. Four main criteria developed for selecting the primary data collection method. The method should:

1. Be rich, offering quality information about students in a breadth of outcome areas
2. Produce valid results and reflect the uniqueness of the institution
3. Be minimally intrusive on the time of students and faculty
4. Serve students by engaging them in reflection on their own education, and help them as they prepare for their careers or further education

Based on these criteria, the portfolio method was chosen. Because of Rose-Hulman's computer-intensive environment, it was determined that the portfolio system should be electronically based.[4]

Promise

The electronic portfolio (RosE-Portfolio) was designed and developed by Rose-Hulman faculty, staff, and students.[5] The design was driven by how portfolios were to be used by both faculty and students. Having portfolios in an electronic format has four distinct advantages over using paper portfolios:

1. Efficiency
2. Asynchronous access
3. Validation of process
4. Adaptability

- **Efficiency.** Portfolio systems can be very cumbersome for both students and faculty to manage. By developing an electronic system to access, store, view, and rate student material, the amount of effort to manage the system is minimized. We were also able to design a system that integrates the student submission process, the rating process, the reporting process, and the curriculum mapping process into one module. When students enter the system, they can easily access the list of student outcome objectives, see the rating rubrics, view online help, or submit questions and comments.[6]

- **Asynchronous access.** The RosE-Portfolio system is web-based, and access is made through the local area network using the user's network username and password. This allows both students and raters to access the system from anywhere at anytime they have access to the web. Students can make submissions to their portfolios from their homes, their residence hall rooms, or anywhere it is convenient for them at any time. This means that students can work on their portfolios at times when they are not so busy with their coursework. The system also allows raters to rate at their convenience against pre-established rubrics. Because teams of raters are involved, the system also provides for inter-rater reliability testing. This "calibration" of the rating process promotes the validity of the rating results. This aspect of the rating system will become increasingly important as we begin to involve alumni and business partners in the rating of portfolios.

- **Validation of process.** In designing the system requirements for the development of the software, it was found that the process of determining design requirements forced the Commission to think through the purpose and scope of the system in ways that actually promoted the efficiency and validity of the process. That is, by having to clearly articulate what the features of the portfolio would be, it was necessary to think through what we wanted students to do, why we wanted them to do it, and what we were going to do with the information. This was particularly true for the design of the rating module. The rating system was driven by the purpose of the ratings and how the results would be used. By integrating all these decisions into the design of the portfolio itself, it was possible to continuously check our decisions against good assessment practices.

- **Adaptability.** One of the design constraints was for the system to be adaptable to other forms of documentation and assessment. As the institute-wide electronic portfolio system was developed, implemented, and improved, it was adapted for use in individual classes. Building on the existing system, some faculty modified the portfolio structure for both student teams and individual student submissions for learning outcomes that were specific to the course, in some cases moving to a paperless environment. Plans are also being made to prototype a system to be used for the faculty promotion, tenure, and retention process. The power of the electronic format and ease of adaptability serve to promote multiple uses of the system.

Pitfalls

In spite of the advantages of the electronic portfolio, there are also some pitfalls that need to be avoided.

1. Too complex
2. Inadequate design expertise/technology resources
3. Technology overshadows assessment
4. Short-term commitment

- **Too complex.** It is important to minimize the number of steps and the complexity of instructions in the use of an electronic portfolio. For the users of the system, both the design and the materials developed to support the implementation of the system must be kept simple. The term user-friendly has to be a key aspect of developing materials to walk people through the process of submitting, reviewing, and rating portfolios. If the system is too complex to be easily understood, or if the materials developed are too complex, it will be difficult to get participation from both faculty and students. This is not to say that the electronic portfolio can't be designed for multiple purposes and users. However, for the individual user, the complexity must be invisible.

◇ **Lack of design expertise.** Many campuses do not have expertise available to assist with the design of an efficient and effective electronic portfolio system. The responsibility for developing the system may be left with those who do not have the appropriate programming/technical expertise, or do not understand the importance of involving multiple constituents in the design process before developing the system. Without the appropriate expertise, it is unlikely that an electronic portfolio system can be designed to meet the needs of assessment.

◇ **Technology overshadows assessment.** For those who have both the resources and the desire to develop an electronic portfolio system, it is possible that the enthusiasm for the electronic side confuses the means and the ends. It is important to remember that the electronic nature of the portfolio is to enhance the portfolio process by making it more efficient and user-friendly. However, efficiency should not be at the expense of good practices in assessing student learning. Portfolios of any kind are not for novices. Whether the portfolio is electronic or paper-based, it is important to understand the purpose of the portfolio, what data are going to be collected, who is going to be responsible for submitting material to the portfolios, what rating criteria are going to be used, who is going to rate the material in the portfolio, how the rating process is going to be organized and managed, the use of the data collected, and how the students are going to get feedback. The answers to these questions help to drive the design of the system, and not the other way around. In any case, best practices for student assessment should be followed.[7]

◇ **Short-term commitment.** When viewed as a short-term commitment, the development of an electronic portfolio system (as well as a paper-based system) is sure to fail. Because the commitment required to support and sustain a portfolio system is substantial, it is not an approach that should be entered into for the short-term. Resources need to be allocated for the design of the system. Faculty and students need to be educated about the use of the system. The system needs to be managed and nurtured. All of these processes take time to develop, implement, and improve to meet the needs of the institution.

Lessons Learned

The following lessons learned in the past four years can be applied to the task of developing an institution-wide plan for assessing student learning.

◇ **Develop a common language.** The importance of language as a means of conveying meaning cannot be overstated. This is especially true in the language of assessment in the current environment, where there are many debates about the role of assessment as it relates to accreditation requirements. Confusion over the meaning and use of the language of assessment often alienates the very people who need to be engaged in the development and use of assessment processes–the faculty. Because there are no commonly accepted standards of assessment terminology, it is important to develop a common vocabulary of assessment terms at the beginning of the process and to agree to use it consistently.

◇ **Involve the key stakeholders.** At the beginning of the process, identify who your key stakeholders are. This will vary from institution to institution. Everyone is important, but not everyone is equally important to determining what outcomes are appropriate for your institution. Don't forget to involve students!

◇ **Ask them, ask them, and ask them again.** Faculty have a very long list of important things they have to do. Not all of them make it to the top of the list. It would be erroneous to assume that, just because you don't get feedback from faculty, that they are not interested or do not want to have input. It is important to keep them informed of the progress that is being made and to solicit their input.

◇ **Uncouple institutional assessment from faculty evaluation.** Institutions have processes in place to evaluate faculty performance. The assessment of student outcomes for institutional effectiveness purposes should not be one of them. Faculty cooperation is critical to assessment, and if faculty feel that the process can be used against them, the likelihood of their participation is decreased.

◇ **All assessment questions are not equal.** Use a common sense approach to planning. As the assessment plan begins to be developed, it is important to realize that you cannot do everything. There will be a lot of interesting questions that you would like to have answered, but it is important to prioritize and begin with the most important questions.

◇ **One size does not fit all.** The pressure to develop assessment plans and the lack of expertise in institutional or program assessment can lead to the temptation to adopt another institution's assessment methodology without seriously considering whether it is appropriate to the local environment. Much can be learned by looking at what others are doing to assess student learning outcomes, but it is rare that the plans and methodology of one institution can be adopted in total at another.

Summary

Deciding what methodology to use to assess student learning outcomes is an important aspect of assessment planning. The criteria for choosing an appropriate methodology should be carefully developed and tailored to the needs of the institution. Electronic portfolios can be both efficient and effective to assess student learning outcomes at a program or institutional level. When principles of best practice for assessing student learning are applied, the benefits for promoting institutional effectiveness is greatly enhanced. Institutions developing assessment plans and choosing assessment methodologies can strengthen their processes by reviewing the lessons learned by others.

Notes

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2. Arter, J. A., et al. 1995. Portfolios for assessment and instruction. ERIC Digest No. ED388890.
3. A national database of electronic portfolios can be found at <http://www.aahe.org/teaching/portfolio_db.htm>.
4. Rose-Hulman has had a student-owned laptop program since 1995.
5. For a complete discussion of the design of the Rose-Hulman electronic portfolio, see Rogers, G. M. and J. Williams. 1999. Building a better portfolio. ASEE *PRISM*, January: pp. 30–32. Rogers, G. M. and T. Chow. Electronic portfolios and the assessment of student learning. *Assessment Update.*
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A Top Ten List of Assessment Tools for Academic Courses and Programs

Marie A. Revak
Debora L. Scheffel

> The overriding purpose of assessment is to understand how educational programs are working and to determine whether they are contributing to student growth and development. Hence, the ultimate emphasis of assessment is on programs rather than on individual students.
>
> - Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta, *Assessment Essentials*

In May 1999 the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) visited the Air Force Academy. In the verbal out-brief to the Academy's Superintendent, the accreditation team commented that the Academy's assessment effort was "marvelous." By employing multiple assessment techniques, the Academy is able to identify patterns of convergence in data as a basis for programmatic changes. The purpose of this session is to highlight the variety of assessment tools in use to accomplish ongoing assessment of the Academy's academic program at both the course and departmental levels. The presented tools have broad applicability in a variety of settings.

We were able to identify several unique program assessment tools by reviewing the Academy's Assessment Catalog. The catalog provides an at-a-glance summary of assessment efforts related to cadet academic achievement, performance of Academy graduates in the Air Force, and performance of the departments and agencies in their educational mission. The catalog was first created in 1997 as a product of an administrative initiative to document assessment efforts already in place. The USAFA Assessment Catalog serves several purposes. It allows for cross-flow of assessment ideas between and among departments and agencies; identifies internal and external sources of assessment data; allows for easy identification of qualitative and quantitative assessment methods; categorizes assessment instrument types; tracks the currency and frequency of use of assessment methods; identifies decisions based on assessment data; provides judgments about the utility of the assessment methods (low, moderate, high); and identifies knowledgeable points of contact within departments and agencies. We carefully examined the entries to select tools that could be easily modified by other institutions and programs.

According to Palomba and Banta, "a key to assessment success is involving faculty in the process" (p. 10). The views and voices of faculty members need to be considered when framing questions and identifying topics of inquiry. In many instances, faculty are responsible for designing and implementing an assessment plan as well as reporting results and making recommendations for programmatic changes. Students are also key players in the implementation of a successful assessment plan. The tools presented grew from a bottom-up implementation at the Academy. Each academic department designs and implements tool to meet its specific needs. Faculty involvement is high, and students are key players in many of the assessments.

Some of the more unique tools to be discussed include:

- Structured focus groups
- Archived course records
- Student management teams
- Surveys and interviews of graduates
- Study time and workload surveys
- Grade histories
- Anchored exams

- Grading exercises
- Visiting faculty feedback
- Curriculum benchmarking.

Every assessment tool comes with own strengths, weaknesses, strategies, guidelines, data analysis techniques, and uses. The assessment tools listed above have broad application potential in a variety of settings. Below, we've addressed these issues for five of our favorite program assessment tools. During our session, we'll share some of the actual assessment instruments, discuss logistical procedures, and share example reports. The remaining five tools will be discussed in a similar manner during our presentation.

☐ **Structured Focus Groups**

Purpose: To involve students in the course in program assessment through an interactive medium.

Strengths: Feedback is deeper and richer than what can be obtained using traditional surveys and can provide insights that might not occur without interaction between students. Students feel that they have a voice. Method is more efficient than individual interviews.

Weaknesses: Requires a time commitment on the part of the students and the facilitator. Requires mature, responsible student participation and skill on the part of the facilitator. Requires substantial planning. Shy or minority students may be reluctant to participate. Students may suggest unreasonable changes to the course or program.

Strategies and guidelines: Select a representative sample of 15-20 students. Follow the protocol developed at the Air Force Academy to include audiotaping of the focus group session.

Data analysis techniques: Qualitative analysis of the focus group transcript to include the identification of trends. Quantitative analysis of student satisfaction data and counting of trend data. Can be correlated with student ratings data.

☐ **Archived Course Records**

Purpose: To capture a snapshot the entire course and document changes to the course over several semesters.

Strengths: Helps maintain consistency in course content and delivery in the context of rapidly changing organizations. May be used by faculty to update their academic portfolios. Provides corporate knowledge. Easily accomplished immediately after the closeout of the semester.

Weaknesses: May challenge the perception of academic freedom. Can be time-consuming if not accomplished immediately. Sufficient document storage space required.

Strategies and guidelines: Collect and assemble all course-related documents and products to include syllabus, handouts, formative and summative assessments, student evaluations, and other feedback. Also included are course administrative documents such as a list of instructors, the title and edition of the textbook, a summary of curricular changes, and a historical course grade summary.

Data analysis techniques: Qualitative analysis of changes, themes, and trends in both curriculum and evaluation.

☐ **Student Management Teams**

Purpose: To involve students in the course in program assessment while the course is ongoing.

Strengths: Feedback is continual and allows for changes during the current offering of the course. Students have a voice, and the instructor has a mechanism for requesting and receiving feedback on a regular basis. Allows for the collection of richer, deeper assessment data. Instructors may utilize the Student Management Team to address specific concerns.

Weaknesses: Requires a time commitment on the part of the students and faculty member. Requires mature, responsible student participation. May require a reward mechanism for students to ensure quality feedback. Students may suggest unreasonable changes to the course or program.

Strategies and guidelines: May use volunteers, or instructor may appoint 3–4 members to the Student Management Team. Teams meet once per week with the instructor and may schedule additional meetings with or without the instructor.

Data analysis techniques: Qualitative summary of the accomplishments of the team and possible correlation with student satisfaction ratings and or outcomes.

☐ **Surveys and Interviews of Graduates**

Purpose: To assess courses and programs from the perspective of students after they have entered the workforce or graduate school.

Strengths: Provides a different perspective than currently enrolled students. Serves as a validity check for student survey data. Fosters alumni relations.

Weaknesses: Low participation rates due to low motivation and hard-to-find contact information. Need to determine appropriate wait time and intervals for survey repetition.

Strategies and guidelines: Need substantial administrative support to develop, administer, collect, and analyze survey data. Survey must be as short as possible while still tapping the most important information. Multiple methods of response may be necessary. Plan for dissemination of results to survey participants.

Data analysis techniques: Both quantitative and qualitative depending on survey questions.

☐ **Anchored Exams**

Purpose: Common final exam items allow comparison of student performance on key topic outcomes over the course of several semesters.

Strengths: Helps maintain consistency in core course content in the context of changes in the curriculum and teaching personnel. Based on final exam items, benchmarking is easily accomplished immediately after the closeout of the semester. Most applicable to courses with a relatively stable content.

Weaknesses: May challenge the perception of academic freedom. Could inhibit timely changes to rapidly changing curriculum. May lead to the testing of less-important skills and concepts. May not apply to courses undergoing major curricular reform.

Strategies and guidelines: Assemble valid and reliable test items for inclusion in final exams over the course of several semesters. Conduct test item analysis on each item, track student performance, and match items to established course criteria.

Data analysis techniques: Statistical comparisons of performance on test items. Test item analysis data can also be examined for changes in item difficulty and selectivity. Map items to course criteria to determine whether course goals and objectives are being met.

Essential to any comprehensive assessment program is the triangulation of data and its subsequent use in curricular decisions. By employing multiple assessment techniques and collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, assessors are able to identify patterns of convergence in data as a basis for programmatic changes. The assessment methods presented during this session actively involve faculty and students and can be tailored to specific course and program goals. The tools can be used to answer locally generated questions, meet program assessment and accreditation requirements, and aid the curricular decision making process.

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Test Anxiety and Meeting the Mission: Recognizing Necessary Institutional Resources and Overcoming the Resistance of Using Tests to Assess Student Learning Outcomes

Cheryl Knox
Rita Knuesel

Introduction

> The College of Saint Benedict (CSB) and Saint John's University (SJU) are two liberal arts colleges located four miles apart in Central Minnesota. Saint Benedict's is a college for women and Saint John's is a college for men. The students of these two colleges share in one common education, as well as coeducational social, cultural and spiritual programs. ... CSB/SJU have a common curriculum, identical degree requirements and a single academic calendar. All academic departments are joint, and classes are offered throughout the day on both campuses. The academic program is coordinated by the Provost for Academic Affairs, who is assisted by undergraduate academic deans on each campus (CSB/SJU Academic Catalog, p. 4).

Our NCA site visit for comprehensive evaluation occurred in November 1998 on both campuses. Although we were re-accredited, areas needing further attention included general education assessment and assessment in academic departments. A required progress report was submitted in December 2000. This paper describes (1) our transformational strategies, which overcame our institutional roadblocks to productive assessment, and (2) our effective usage of standardized and locally developed assessment tests resulting in curricular revisions.

Transformation of Campus Culture

☐ The Past

In the recent past, our faculty resisted the challenge to assess student learning. Some considered assessment and review an encroachment on their academic freedom. Curricular changes within departments were often based on hunches by faculty based on their own educational experiences and traditions, rather than assessment and program review outcomes. Central to our recent attitudinal transformation is a shift in our and the faculty's understanding about assessment. We have had conversations at various levels about what assessment of student learning is, what assessment data are, and how we can use assessment to improve the curriculum. We have moved from a focus on faculty teaching to a focus on student learning. (Huba and Freed, 2000; López, 1999; Knox and Knuesel, 2000). In Table 1 we list the strategies we developed to overcome our specific roadblocks.

Although these strategies moved our campuses to a state of readiness for active assessment work, we still struggled with our assessment efforts.

Table 1. Our Inventory of Needed Assessment Resources and Strategies

Inventory	Roadblocks	Strategies
Faculty Involvement	Many faculty dubious about worth of assessment. Pervasive faculty attitude of "You can't make me assess."	Created common understanding of (1) what is assessment of student learning, (2) what are assessment data, and (3) how we can use our findings to improve the curriculum.
Assessment Committee	Pitiful and anemic. Faculty with no expertise or interest.	We created a new and enhanced assessment committee. Senior faculty with appropriate expertise were appointed to the committee. Committee members were sent to the NCA Annual Meeting to further develop expertise. Provost is now an active member of the assessment committee.
CAO	Inadequate provost support.	We hired a new provost who is knowledgeable, invested and experienced in assessment and program review practices. In his inaugural address, he set his NCA agenda for the next two years.
Money	Inadequate funding.	Ongoing funding established by institution-wide commitment and reallocation of resources.
Personnel	No one person was responsible.	The academic deans became highly involved and initiated the renovation of our assessment and program review processes. The deans and provost created a part-time facilitator of program review and assessment, who is a member of the assessment committee.
Program Review	No regular program review process in place.	Provost worked with standing faculty committee to finalize program review policy. Deans and committee established timetable for program review.
Strategic Plan	Assessment and program review absent from strategic plan.	Strategic plan rewritten to include assessment and program review initiative.
Communications	No regular, deliberate communications.	Chair of Assessment Committee regularly reports at faculty meetings and presidents' cabinet meetings. Assessment Committee minutes are posted in an intranet folder available to all community members.

☐ The Mission

To our surprise, we discovered that many of our faculty leaders of assessment did not understand the fundamental connections between the institutional mission statement, the departmental/program mission statement, the departmental assessment plan, and the process of assessing student learning. Without this basic understanding that one leads to the other, our institutions continued to suffer assessment paralysis. The task of assessment seemed too large and ambiguous because the touch-point of assessment was missing. We should be testing whether we are meeting our mission statement about student learning. When this fundamental concept was finally realized, assessment became easier because improved strategies became obvious. Suddenly, assessment outcomes became real; curricula were improved within departments and programs; and the ownership of success and pride of meeting the challenge resulted in a boost of institutional morale.

☐ Choosing Tests

Our departments and programs also floundered with incorporating assessment activities into their routines because they believed they had to independently develop their own assessment instruments from scratch. Using the combination of standardized and locally developed tests (1) enabled departments and programs to move forward with assessment strategies, and (2) allowed comparisons with national reference groups without losing the ability to study the uniqueness of our departments/programs. In Table 2 we list the standardized and locally developed tests we have used to date. In Table 3 we explain the source of the tests. Assessment results and curricular modifications as a result of assessment testing were reported to the institutional assessment committee, whose wide membership includes faculty with expertise in test measurement, the academic provost, one academic dean, the facilitator of assessment and program review, student representatives, and a student development representative.This committee wrote our NCA progress report.

Table 2. Departmental Usage of Standardized and Locally Developed Tests

Assessment Tools Inventory	Standardized Tests											Locally Developed Tests					
Departments and Programs	**MFT**	**ACS**	**CAP**	**AP**	**Praxis II**	**CPA Licencure**	**PSAS**	**AASSWB**	**NCLEX**	**GRE (subtest)**	**TUCE**	**Writing Tests**	**Portfolio**	**Adjudication**	**Language Placement**	**Juries**	**Disciplinary Content**
Accounting						S											
Art													S				
Asian Studies																	
Biology	S																S
Chemistry	S	S					A										
Communications							S, A										
Computer Science	S																
Economics							S, A, F				S						
Education				S	S							S	S				
English												S	S				
Environmental Studies							A										
Gender and Women's Studies							S, F, A										
History												S					
Management	S						S, F, A						S				
Mathematics	S																
MCL															S		
Military Science																	
Music	S															S	
Nursing			S		E		S, F, C, P, S										
Nutrition																	
Peace Studies																	
Philosophy																	

S=students; A=alumnae/alumni; F=faculty; C=clinical site; P=patient; E=employer

Table 2. (continued)

	Standardized Tests											Locally Developed Tests					
	MFT	ACS	CAP	AP	Praxis II	CPA Licencure	PSAS	AASSWB	NCLEX	GRE (subtest)	TUCE	Writing Tests	Portfolio	Adjudication	Language Placement	Juries	Disciplinary Content
Physics										S							
Political Science	S											S					
Psychology	S																
Sociology																	
Social Work								S									
Theater							A, S							S			
Theology																	S
Physical Education																	
Liberal Studies																	
Academic Skills																	
Honors																	
Natural Science																	
Social Science																	
Humanities																	

S=students; A=alumnae/alumni; F=faculty; C=clinical site; P=patient; E=employer

Table 3. Assessment and Program Review Tests

Standardized Tests		
AASSWB	American Association of State Social Work Boards	S
ACS	American Chemical Society	S
AP	Academic Profile	S
CAP	California Academic Press–Critical Thinking	S
GRE	Graduate Record Exam	S
MFT	Major Field Test	S
NCLEX	National Council Licensure Examination–Nursing	S
Praxis II	Teacher Licensure	S
PSAS	Program Self Assessment Survey	S, F, A
TUCE	Test of Understanding of College Economics	S
Locally Developed Tests		
Adjudication	Theater only	S, F
CAT	Classroom assessment techniques	S
Juries	Music only	S
Language Placement	Foreign language only	S
Portfolio	Systematic scoring rubric–program-specific	S
Writing Tests	Faculty scored with systematic rubric	S

S=students; A=alumnae/alumni; F=faculty; C=clinical site; P=patient; E=employer

☐ Curricular Revision

We cite two of many possible examples of immediate curricular improvements as a result of using assessment tests.

Using two locally developed tests/assessment methods, the English department discovered their majors were weak in grammar skills. As a result, a new two-credit grammar class required of all majors is being developed to remedy this inadequacy. While many programs would consider this an old-fashioned value, our English department regards knowledge of sentence and paragraph construction critical to writing well and essential to their departmental mission of student learning. Another of their concerns was how multiple professors would evaluate students' portfolios using a standard rubric. Their remedy was to schedule and organize their own workshops attended by all English department members to develop their common evaluation methods. These workshops have further cemented their sense of common purpose and solidarity.

In theater, an outside practitioner was brought in to adjudicate our four productions. Portfolios of writing–i.e., samples from criticism and history courses, resumes, photo documentations of scenic and costume classes, etc.–were analyzed. Alumnae and alumni surveys were conducted, and focus group studies of our current students were conducted by one of our assessment experts on campus. We discovered that our technical classes and technical experiences did not have enough hands-on opportunities for our students. Sound and lighting was not addressed strongly in our theater curriculum. The theater faculty have decided that the second technical class will have sound as part of the curriculum and will require the students to participate in the light hang for both touring companies and our production. An unexpected outcome came about because we used the National Association of Schools of Theater (NAST) accrediting standards in our assessment and program review efforts. The department has asked the administration to investigate whether we would like to apply for this theater accreditation.

Conclusion

It became evident on our campuses that personnel and physical resources needed to be identified to assure successful assessment and program review strategies. Recognizing our mission statement and its immediate role in assessment and program review strategies was critical in creating a common understanding of meaningful assessment activities. The realization that we could and probably should use multiple methods to test student learning moved our campuses from a culture of fear and resistance to a culture of action and accomplishment.

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The Electronic Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment Model for Graduate Education

Barbara L. Nicholson

Why might a student in a preservice educational administration program find the development of a professional portfolio useful? For some, the primary rationale would be compliance with institutional requirements for obtaining their master's degrees. There are, however, other reasons to consider the beginning of a professional portfolio at the preservice stage, some functional, others more philosophical. This paper provides an introduction to the practical and theoretical elements involved in the development of the Marshall Preservice Principal Portfolio (MP3). Before turning to the MP3 itself, however, the benefits of beginning the construction of a portfolio during the preservice phase of an administrative career merit some attention. It is these benefits–an ability for self-assessment, the value of establishing a reflective practice, and the potential to transform pedagogy–that form the conceptual foundation on which the Marshall Preservice Principal Portfolio rests.

Conceptual Issues

☐ Self-assessment

Recent years have seen a number of challenges to the orthodoxy implicit in assessment rhetoric from kindergarten to postgraduate classrooms, their universal intent being the improvement of public education. In higher education, this discourse has been energized by a variety of progressive approaches, among them an increasing acceptance of qualitative measures that are perhaps less authoritative but more illuminating than the quantitative measures that have dominated the field literally for decades. Among these approaches is portfolio assessment. While still primarily used in conjunction with more conventional evaluation methods (e.g., comprehensive examinations, certification tests, and performance appraisal instruments), the portfolio has been gaining the support of both students and faculty across disciplines, and it has had a significant impact on teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Holmes Group, 1986; Lyons, 1998; Moss, 1997; National Board, 1989; Schon, 1987; Schulman, 1998; Tierney, 1992).

The implementation of the portfolio as either an alternative or correlative assessment tool in educational leadership programs, however, has been less ubiquitous. This has been a puzzling phenomenon to some who work with preservice administrators, particularly in light of the body of research concerning the centrality of the principal's performance to school effectiveness. Despite what we know about the principal's integral role in various effectiveness measures, the majority of preservice administration programs have been characterized by the dubious premise that mastery of a prescribed knowledge base adequately prepares principals for the instrumental problems they will encounter in leadership practice. This approach has not only divorced propositional knowledge (knowing what) from procedural knowledge (knowing how), but has also privileged the former to the virtual exclusion of the latter. The challenge for both those who teach and those enrolled in educational leadership programs is to reconcile these competing philosophies with an epistemological model that recognizes the value of both. The development of a preservice portfolio can help not only to effect that reconciliation, but also to provide a foundation for the continued growth and development of the practicing administrator.

☐ Establishing a Reflective Practice

It is ironic that a discipline that at the beginning of the twentieth century was exhorting its students to adopt what Murphy (1995) calls "the captain of commerce role" (63) is now witness to some of the better known management theorists' emphasizing business models predicated on educational premises. One of the more recognizable is Peter Drucker who, in 1989, was describing management as a liberal art: "Management is...'liberal' because it deals with the fundamentals of knowledge, self-knowledge, wisdom, and leadership; 'art' because it is practice and application" (231)

Unlike propositional knowledge, self-knowledge is not easily assessed in conventional ways. Sergiovanni (1995) argues that individuals aspiring to be effective principals need to know what they value, what they're committed to. It is this quality to which most refer when they employ the term *vision*. Values, commitment, and vision, however, do not inhere in the content of a knowledge base, regardless of its breadth or depth. They grow in the spaces we carve out for ourselves to spend in contemplation when we begin to sense an incongruity between what we believe and what we are doing, i.e., in the friction of theory misaligned with practice. In the well-documented fragmentation of the principal's day, however, there's little time for this kind of reflection, what Schon (1987) calls "reflection-in-action" (22).

Recognizing that the cultivation of a habit requires repetition, the MP3 is predicated on the premise that ongoing reflection, from the beginning of the student's program to the end, lays the groundwork for the extension of that behavior to professional practice. Underlying this premise is a constructivist foundation that identifies reflection as essential to the student's ability to continue to evolve as a self-directing, inquiring learner, and that recognizes lifelong learning as not only valuable, but as imperative in a world where information with knowledge potential grows exponentially on a daily basis.

Neither information nor knowledge stands still. As information has accumulated, scholars have added to their knowledge bases in every discipline by making reasoned judgments about what constituted a valuable addition and what didn't. That task grows ever more difficult, however, as distinguishing what information is useful from what isn't, and determining how we've come to know that, gets increasingly complicated. That process is understood as constructivism, and reflection is its essential quality.

One becomes a lifelong learner through understanding and awareness of the processes she/he engages in when she/he "comes to know." The identification of those processes is the product of thoughtful deliberation, i.e., reflection, which then "enhances [one's] ability to [continue to] learn and make sense of new information" (Lambert et al., 1995: 18). Schon (1987) argues that reflection is central to growth and development, that it is the ability to reflect on learning that allows students to construct the theoretical frameworks that will guide their practice. This awareness of the processes through which they've absorbed what they know imbues learning with a new character, making it dynamic, individually meaningful, and, most important, autonomous.

It is autonomy that separates constructivism as an epistemological construct from previous conceptions of how students learn. Previous epistemologies have for the most part construed students as beneficiaries in a sort of philanthropic relationship with their professors. Students came to "receive" the knowledge their professors "gave" to them, rendering them essentially passive participants in the learning process. As opposed to knowing subjects, they were cast as uninformed objects. Constructivist theory, however, consistent with Dewey's (1916) characterization of the student as a self-directed being, shifts the responsibility for learning from professor to student.

Embedded in that responsibility is the need for self-assessment. The more conventional forms of assessment (e.g., course, comprehensive, or licensing examinations), as Lambert et al. (1995) point out, "reinforce the notion that knowledge exists outside the student, and that the teacher's role is to transmit, and test the ... acquisition of knowledge" (24). Portfolio assessment, however, gives the student a pivotal role. It is a process characterized by a shift from what Chittenden and Gardner (1991) call a testing culture to an assessment culture; one in which assessment is continual and integrated, as opposed to transient and fragmentary. This shift represents a significant change in our understanding of assessment, one that is best facilitated not by a culminating examination, but by students' critical assessment of and reflection on the experiences they have as they prepare to become principals.

☐ Transforming Pedagogy

The potential of the portfolio to resolve competing claims is not limited to epistemology, although its epistemological dimensions may be of most benefit to the individual student. There are aspects to the use of the portfolio as a programmatic assessment tool that make it valuable to institutions as well. Critical pedagogical issues for administrative preparation programs are frequently obscured, deliberately or not, by debates concerning academic questions of dubious importance. Among those critical issues is the profound sense of dissatisfaction with contemporary educational administration programs, which are characterized as being largely irrelevant and out of touch with practical concerns.

In addressing the historical underpinnings of educational administration, Murphy (1995) believes we allowed that rift to develop out of deference to the persuasiveness of the scientific model and in response to the abuses of what he characterizes as the "prescriptive era" in the evolution of the knowledge base. The result, he argues, is this:

> Knowledge was something that was created at the university and applied in the field. It was a nonrecursive relationship. As a result of this academic self-conceit, a distinct breach developed between the university and field dimensions of the profession, one incorrectly and arrogantly labeled the theory-practice gap. The officially sanctioned knowledge base became increasingly less useful to practitioners. Worse yet, the processes and procedures employed to transmit this knowledge were often diametrically opposed to conditions that characterize (sic) the workplace in which school administrators found themselves. (69)

Murphy's analysis is correct, of course, and that's a shame. It is a problematic situation for both the university professor, who must necessarily concern herself with the constraints of institutional support and the retention/promotion/tenure process, and the student of administration who, having his graduate education reduced to an exercise in instrumentalism because certification requirements tend to force administrative preparation programs into a one-size-fits-all shape, resigns himself to enduring hours of pointless study in the interest of getting his credential. While there are always exceptions, such a circumstance would appear to be the rule. Were it not, we wouldn't continue to thrash about trying to find ways to ameliorate it.

While a broad discussion of strategies for eliminating institutional constraints and the instrumental quality of certification requirements is beyond the scope and intent of this paper, it is possible to examine the portfolio as one small reform that has the potential to at least mitigate their impact on the relationship between universities and schools as well as between faculties and students. If it is true that reforms generally falter on their failure to conform to the self-interest of those involved, the portfolio has an excellent chance to succeed.

If it is the gap between university values and elementary and secondary school needs that keeps the two at cross-purposes, a mutual focus on the world of practice can serve to redefine the gap by making it common ground. If we reconceive of pedagogy not as the art or science of teaching but as lying at the intersection of teaching and learning, a discursive space wherein each informs the other, the potential of the portfolio to reform pedagogy begins to take shape. Supplemented by corresponding programmatic transformations (e.g., a redistribution of field experiences throughout the program, accompanied by reflective entries developed in collaboration with field mentors and faculty), the portfolio can create multiple opportunities for a discursive relationship between universities and schools and between faculty and students that is pedagogically rewarding; one in which knowledge of what is useful in the world of practice can be jointly constructed. Students can play an integral in that transformation.

Practical Matters

The choice to use an electronic format for portfolio construction was made for its congruence with the project's conceptual principles as well as for practical reasons. As emerging technologies expand the dimensions of the classroom, demands that education professionals be familiar with not only their potential but their application increase as well. Because what is required of an individual to be technologically literate is something of a moving target, creating the portfolio in a constantly changing digital environment constitutes the kind of ongoing learning process encouraged by constructivist pedagogy.

From a pragmatic perspective, there are two additional benefits which accrue to the student who assembles a preservice portfolio. First, the electronic format allows for portability and ease of handling (for both students and university files); expedites editing; provides options that are either unavailable or awkwardly achieved in conventional portfolios (e.g., qualitative research can capitalize on video streaming, audio recording, and scanning documents as opposed to submitting reams of paper and video and cassette tapes); includes a broad range of statistical packages for quantitative research; simplifies backup; and represents a kind of compact credential for potential employers as it can be either copied to a zip disk or pressed to a compact disk.

Second, the number of states that require portfolio evaluation for practicing administrators is growing. Given the number of accrediting agencies that now recommend the process, an increased interest on the part of state agencies that certify or license school administrators can be detected as well. Among the benefits cited to Brown and Irby (1997) by practicing administrators who had constructed portfolios were opportunities to reflect on their experiences by documenting their strengths, collecting evidence of their accomplishments, identifying their weaknesses, setting goals for improvement, and planning for their own professional development based on those goals (53–54). Leithwood and Montgomery (1986) suggest that the ability to reflect on practice is central to an effective principalship, particularly as it relates to problem-solving. Development of a preservice portfolio provides a foundation on which this kind of reflective practice can rest.

MacIsaac (1991) makes a useful distinction between the portfolio and the folio, both of which are featured in the Marshall Preservice Principal Portfolio. The portfolio contains only those entries chosen by the student to demonstrate proficiency or comprehension of a specific set of skills or body of knowledge. The folios are less discriminatory, including the accumulated body of work for a course, project, or program. The student's MP3 disk will include four folios:

- The *course folio* (with a folder for each course in the program, each including the assignments the professor-of-record identified as folio artifacts);
- The *field experience folio* (with a folder for each of the field-based experiences required in conjunction with each course, plus the student's reflective evaluation of each experience);
- The *reflective folio* (six essays corresponding to the ISLLC standards/principles); and
- The *ancillary folio* (evidence of the student's learning in other environments, e.g., school improvement councils, school-community meetings, conferences, and workshops).

The disk will also include the student's portfolio, i.e., selected artifacts from the folios that provide evidence of the her/his growth and development throughout the program. The final step, grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1994), who argue that we come to know ourselves primarily through our interactions with others, is a public seminar in which MP3 students will present the completed portfolios. The setting is designed to engage students, faculty, peers, and mentors in a collaborative inquiry that ultimately invites all participants to revisit their own leadership philosophies; the goal is to internalize the explaining, elaborating, and interrogating of our respective understandings in a learning community as an ongoing element of professional practice.

It is, of course, in the implementation of assessment reform that the larger challenges exist. The transition from an incremental program, wherein students move in a linear fashion through a prescribed sequence of courses, an internship, and a final examination, to one that is more holistic in nature, combining coursework with field-based experiences and relying on self-assessment, is not simple.

For faculty, issues of epistemological appropriateness, theoretical underpinnings, and assessment validity are among the matters of concern. Possessing the skills necessary to work in an electronic environment may constitute a complication as well, and development of assessment rubrics is especially difficult. Students faced with the task of creating an instrument through which they themselves must choose how to demonstrate their capabilities will experience some uncertainty as well, and many may share the same technological anxieties as their professors. Full consideration of these and other questions must be handled in a more immediate context, i.e., faculty development sessions and student workshops or seminars. However, those involved in the Marshall Preservice Principal Portfolio project– students and faculty alike–have found the transition beneficial.

The portfolio is at the center of an assessment model predicated on self-designed inquiry and realized through clarification and justification. At its center is the transformation of leadership from technical skill to theoretical act, undertaken and sustained by the students themselves. It is they who will enable that transformation, who will look critically at themselves and their work, and who will act on that critique to improve their practice. Such reflection, as Bolin (1988) notes, is not a given of the human condition. It should be. The goal of the portfolio is to create an opportunity for its internalization.

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How It Works: Assessing Student Learning Across the Curriculum

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What Is the Liberal Studies/Professional Skills Program?

The Liberal Studies/Professional Skills program (LS/PS) is a model used by Inver Hills Community College (IHCC) to assess student learning across the curriculum. It is a way to measure what skills students master as they complete their coursework. LS/PS emphasizes both the value of traditional liberal arts and the professional capabilities needed to perform successfully in the twenty-first century. It helps students see the connection between the skills they learn in their courses and the applicability of these skills to their world. It focuses on what students have learned to do within the context of particular courses and provides students with a Skills Profile—as a complement to their transcript—that verifies what skills they have mastered.

For more complete information on the LS/PS program, visit the LS/PS website at www.inverhills.mnscu.edu/lsps *where you can see a sample Skills Profile, the complete Essential Skills grid, rubrics for evaluating student performance, and other information pertinent to the program.*

What Are the Ten Essential Skills?

The model begins with a list of ten Essential Skills that, combined with the knowledge that comes from a college education, provide students with the basis for lifelong learning, service, and employability in contemporary society. These skills are also characterized as:

- Transferable: Once learned and practiced in one context, they can be adapted and applied in other contexts.
- Professional: They are the basis of most professional work.
- Core competencies: Once mastered, they become a part of who a person is.

Each of the Essential Skills is useful in an academic context, a business context, and a community context. For instance, the skill of understanding another point of view applies in understanding persons studied in a text (academic context), customers (business context), and neighbors (community context). Each of the Essentials Skills can be developed: that is, it can be modeled, taught, learned, assessed, and measured by successful demonstration.

The ten Essential Skills are:

1.	*Appreciation skills:*	Achieving a perspective on oneself and the world
2.	*Collaboration skills:*	Working with people effectively
3.	*Conceptual skills:*	Organizing ideas and materials
4.	*Implementation skills:*	Working and organizing effectively

5. *Inquiry skills:* Finding, assimilating, and evaluating new information
6. *Material skills:* Interacting with the physical world
7. *Presentation skills:* Communicating effectively and responsively
8. *Qualification skills:* Making distinctions and finding connections with words
9. *Quantification skills:* Making distinctions and finding connections with numbers
10. *Technology skills:* Using technology

In addition, each of the ten skills is further divided into five subcategories.

1. **Appreciation skills: Achieving a perspective on oneself and the world**
    - Others' viewpoints
    - Breadth of vision
    - Attention to excellence
    - Commitment to principles
    - Personal accountability

2. **Collaboration skills: Working with people effectively**
    - Service to others
    - Teamwork
    - Group project
    - Negotiation
    - Mediation

3. **Conceptual skills: Organizing ideas and materials**
    - Classification structures
    - Theories/hypotheses
    - Models
    - Formal documents
    - Plans

4. **Implementation skills: Working and organizing effectively**
    - Self-management
    - Development
    - Organizational management
    - Protocol
    - Adaptation

5. **Inquiry skills: Finding, assimilating, and evaluating new information**
    - Learning through observation
    - Learning from people
    - Learning through information inquiry
    - Learning from texts
    - Learning from recorded data

6. **Material skills: Interacting with the physical world**
    - Observation
    - Preservation
    - Fabrication
    - Intervention
    - Creation

7. **Presentation skills: Communicating effectively and responsively**
    - Self-presentation
    - Public speaking
    - Information distribution
    - Writing
    - Data illustration

8. **Qualification skills: Making distinctions and finding connections with words**
    - Critical attention to language
    - Critical reasoning
    - Interpretive analysis
    - Interpretive synthesis
    - Creative thinking

9. **Quantification skills: Making distinctions and finding connections with numbers**
    - Data measurement
    - Mathematical operations
    - Data analysis
    - Data synthesis
    - New approaches

10. **Technology skills: Using technology**
    - Presentation technology
    - Information technology
    - Operation technology
    - Design and simulation technology
    - Experimentation technology

The Development of Students' Skills

The LS/PS program is designed to allow students to develop and polish their skills at their own rate; there is no expectation that any student will master all skills (nor that instructors will teach all skills). Each of the five subcategories for the ten skills is arranged in a developmental model—that is, easier levels of the skill precede more difficult ones.

The five levels are defined this way:

1. **Incidental occasion.** These are short, often informal activities without attention to explicit standards, often accomplished while attending to something else. (This level of skill development is not assessed in the LS/PS program.)

2. **Assessed effort.** Here you will find short activities or assignments (for instance, a two- to five-page paper) with clear standards for acceptable quality.

3. **Substantial accomplishment.** Here you will find extended projects of a larger scope, requiring more effort and attention to complete and stringent standards—a clear progression in ability beyond the level above.

4. **Broad ability.** The competencies at this level increase in breadth, versatility, and reliability.

5. **Personal mastery.** At this level, a skill becomes a part of who a student is and what he or she brings to any setting; a student's colleagues vouch for him or her as a person with a deserved reputation for excellence at this skill.

As an example, here are the five levels for the skill of Public Speaking (a subcategory of the Essential Skills of Presentation: Communicating clearly and responsively), with the least difficult level described first:

Public Speaking

- *Incidental occasion:* Speak before a group
- *Assessed effort:* Prepare and deliver a short presentation
- *Substantial accomplishment:* Prepare and deliver a substantial, persuasive presentation
- *Broad ability:* Speak in a variety of organizational or public forums
- *Personal mastery:* Deliver polished presentations consistently

How Does the LS/PS Program Work?

The LS/PS program takes assessment beyond the level of measuring what students know to allowing them to demonstrate through class projects what they can do. The Skills Profile then allows students to show anyone outside of the school setting what they've learned.

Participation in the LS/PS program is voluntary for students and teachers. Interested teachers identify the skills they are already teaching in their courses and work collaboratively to define the rubrics used to evaluate students' achievement in each skill. Teachers enter a student's points in each skill area into a database that converts information from other courses into a graph that visually displays a Skills Profile in progress. Students can access their Skills Profile through the Internet and show it to whomever they choose.

How Is the Skills Profile Used?

We anticipate that the LS/PS Skills Profile will ultimately be of interest to students, faculty, counselors, administrators, transfer institutions, parents, and employers. The LS/PS Skills Profile and database help answer questions such as:

- What skills have I developed? (for students)
- What skills do my students bring to my course? (for faculty)
- Which courses would help this student achieve his or her career goals? (for counselors)
- How qualified is this applicant for the program he or she is applying for? (for transfer institutions)
- Does this potential employee have the skills for this position? (for employers)

How Does a Teacher Record a Student's Skill Development?

An Internet-based system for entering LS/PS information has easy-to-use data entry forms on which teachers enter information about a student's skills progress in a class. The system automatically updates a student's profile each time a teacher enters new information.

How Are Students' Skills Assessed?

Rubrics are the standards for evaluation—or assessment—that instructors at Inver Hills Community College have developed for many of the individual skills in the Essential Skills grid. Instructors from various disciplines developed the rubrics so that these standards could be applied to the assignments, tasks, or performances that students complete in any course or extracurricular activity. Each rubric defines four levels of performance, indicated by the numbers 1 through 4, with 4 being the best (essentially an A) and 1 being unacceptable (a D or an F).

A Sample Rubric

Here is a sample rubric from the Essential Skill of Collaboration: Working with People Effectively for the sub-category of Group Project at the Assessed Effort level: Collaborate to plan and deliver a one-time, short/small group project:

4	Attends 90 percent of group meetings; actively contributes ideas, seeks ideas from other group members, and integrates group ideas and suggestions into a coherent project design. Actively participates in the group's creation, distribution, and completion of project tasks in both development and delivery stages.
3	Attends 90 percent of group meetings. Actively contributes ideas regarding the design and planning of the group project. Performs all assigned tasks in both the development and delivery stages of the project.
2	Attends 80 percent or less of group meetings. Actively contributes ideas regarding the project. Performs most assigned tasks.
1	Attends 80 percent or less of group meetings with little, if any, active contribution to the group process.

How Are Rubrics Used?

Instructors use rubrics to evaluate student performance and then record the points (4, 3, 2, or 1) on the Internet-based database that turns the scores recorded by all instructors into a Skills Profile for each student. The database allows instructors to enter scores quickly and to define the projects/assignments for which students earned skills points.

Because the Skills Profile is designed to record the skills that students have mastered, only scores of 3 or 4 show up on a student's Skills Profile. Instances in which they have performed at the 2 or 1 level are recorded in the database but do not show up on the Skills Profiles.

Creating Rubrics

Writing and refining rubrics is a collaborative process that involves instructors in sharing assignments with one another and discussing how they teach and assess particular skills. The rubrics listed below are always subject to revision and refinement. Because IHCC is a two-year college, instructors have focused on creating rubrics for only the first two levels of the Essential Skills grid–the Assessed Effort and Substantial Accomplishment levels–of performance most usually associated with the first two years of a college education.

Does It Mean Extra Work for Teachers?

Yes, initially. Adapting the rubrics for a course requires extra work, but once teachers begin using rubrics in class, the amount of work typically does not increase, and some teachers feel they spend less time grading because of the clear-cut criteria laid out in advance.

Most teachers are surprised at how easily LS/PS fits into their current assignments. Rubrics simply clarify the criteria for assessing skills that instructors are already teaching. Also, IHCC has been able to make release time and/or stipends available to teachers who begin using the program.

What Are the Benefits of Teaching an LS/PS Course?

Developing rubrics for each skill area helps better define assignments. Students clearly see more the value (in terms of skill development) in certain assignments. The cross-disciplinary workshops for faculty teaching the same skills in their courses create a new opportunity to interact with colleagues. Some previously unrelated courses have become linked.

What Do Teachers Say about LS/PS?

Most teachers participating in the program say that it ties in very well with their current assignments and actually makes grading easier by providing a well-defined set of criteria to show students. It has helped teachers clearly define for themselves which skills a particular course focuses on and consciously develop those skills as the course progresses. IHCC teachers who have participated in LS/PS are excited about the program:

> "Using LS/PS has made me a better teacher." (Speech teacher)
>
> "I like to be able to document outcomes of what I do." (Psychology teacher)
>
> "This is a way to give students acknowledgment for the skills they develop in my course–what does an A or B in English 1108 mean?" (English teacher)
>
> "It has made me more conscious of what is sufficient demonstration of competence of a project and the connection of projects to course outcomes." (English teacher)
>
> "I'm not sure I've changed the way I teach, but I have redesigned my assignments so that they more clearly reflect what I'm trying to teach." (Biology teacher)

How Did the LS/PS Program Develop at IHCC?

IHCC has developed the LS/PS program from the bottom up over the past four years. In 1996, a group of IHCC faculty who had discussed ways to improve student learning brought forth the idea of adapting the Minnesota Skills Profile (MSP) developed by Dr. David Shupe and Jennifer Lundblad (both then at the University of Minnesota) for use at IHCC. In 1997, 20 faculty and several administrators discussed and ultimately adopted the LS/PS concept as a tool to measure outcomes and improve student learning. During the year, faculty continued to meet in small and large groups to develop rubrics for teaching and assessing specific components of the ten Essential Skills.

In the fall of 1998, the LS/PS pilot program officially began with approximately 200 students participating. New faculty were invited to meetings and encouraged to participate in the program. By the fall of 2000, 30 faculty were teaching 75 skills-enhanced courses with 1000 students participating. IHCC faculty have also made several presentations about the LS/PS program at national conferences.

In the spring of 2000, IHCC was awarded two major grants from the MnSCU (Minnesota State Colleges & Universities) Emerging Curriculum and small grants from a private foundation. Funds were used to develop a web site, fund a summer workshop, and provide stipends/release time for faculty to fully implement the LS/PS skills into their courses and work with other campuses in the MnSCU system. In addition, IHCC was selected in August 2000 by the League for Innovation as one of 16 colleges to participate in the Twenty-first Century Learning Outcomes Project.

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Chapter 11

New Designs in Higher Education

Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Special Challenges

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
NCA

"Serving the Common Good: New Designs in Higher Education"

Program of
The Higher Learning Commission

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

March 31 – April 3, 2001
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Haven't We Done This Before? Developing and Implementing a Successful Outcomes Assessment Plan in a Multi-Campus System

Timothy E. Dykstra
Carol Brown

History

Oakland Community College (OCC) is a thirty-five-year-old comprehensive institution serving Michigan's Oakland County in the greater Detroit area. With more than 50,000 students served annually and instructional activity on five different campuses, it is the largest community college the state and the fourteenth largest in the nation. OCC has a rich history of assessment efforts dating back over thirty years. Some faculty, in fact, can produce assessment materials from 1969. For the past decade, the college has made major efforts to engage in significant assessment efforts.

However, despite literally thousands of hours of work by many highly dedicated and skilled faculty and staff members, the college lacked a sustained, institution-wide outcomes assessment model, and therefore sought to rectify the problem. In developing a strategic outcomes assessment plan, one of the first steps OCC undertook was to study why the college continued to lack a successful model even though there had been several attempts to build one. Three key problems with these past efforts emerged from that investigation:

- It had not "closed the loops" by ensuring that the assessment information collected was actually used to improve the teaching/learning process;
- The administration had not provided sufficient resources to sustain the project; and
- The initiatives were allowed to evolve into localized, champion-specific efforts instead of a comprehensive institutional model.

In response, the college developed a new approach to implementing a student outcomes assessment model. This model began by building on the successful elements of past efforts. It also included application of lessons learned from other recent large-scale initiatives such as implementation of an institutional technology plan and the adoption of a campus-wide academic master plan. Lessons from both failures and successes helped to shape the new effort.

Challenges

From the past outcomes assessment efforts of the 1990s and the most recent developments of a successful college model, several key challenges that large organizations face were revealed. Each of these issues had to be recognized and addressed in the revised conceptual framework.

- *Geography.* With multiple campuses scattered throughout a metropolitan area, it was a challenge to get participation from all affected areas.

- *Unions.* The college has several vibrant labor unions and professional associations, each of which had contracts that needed to be respected.
- *Senior faculty.* A significant percentage of the faculty were tenured, with more than twenty years of seniority.
- *Transient administration.* At the same time, for the past several years, significant parts of the upper administration of the college had been transient, causing some in the college to question the need to accept new college initiatives since administrators were "here today and gone tomorrow."
- *Confusion.* Many faculty and administrators were unclear about what student outcomes assessment really was and how it did or did not differ from traditionally held practices.

Current Assessment Model

Using the lessons learned from the past the college developed a new conceptual framework for outcomes assessment. In that development process, the college recognized it could not necessarily do all of the revising itself, so a strategic planning consultant was brought in to provide both expertise and an outside perspective to the issues at hand. The result of that development was a new framework that was actually based on and a modification of the earlier assessment efforts. Not all the work from the past was discarded. The new framework was built on three different piers, each closely connected to the other.

First, given the college's size and diversity, the assessment model had to have some degree of complexity itself. It called for assessment work to occur simultaneously on multiple levels:

- Instructional
- Discipline
- Program
- Institutional
- Out-of-classroom

These levels were necessary to encompass the many different kinds of assessment activity in the college, and they also enabled the model to tie to the elements of outcomes assessment that have appeared in recent discussions by NCA. The recent shift of focus by NCA called for the seamless weaving of assessment throughout the institution, from mission to planning to instruction. Given the college's mission statement to be learner-centered, there was little difficulty in assimilating the NCA outline into the college's framework.

Second, the framework had to incorporate the importance the college placed on shared governance. Therefore, it had to recognize and use the college-wide infrastructure of academic committees. Given these political realities, this was the only way to gain widespread acceptance for student outcomes assessment. As with the writing of the assessment plan itself, this infrastructure incorporated both the old and new. For example, the entire outcomes assessment process was overseen by a steering committee with representation from major constituencies that included the leadership of the Faculty Association, College Senate, deans, and campus presidents. The previously existing Senate Student Outcomes Assessment Committee (SOAC) was preserved, and it was charged with providing the leadership for the implementation of the plan through the shared governance system.

Finally, the revised model called for the creation of a smaller lead unit composed of deans and faculty coordinators from each campus. This unit was charged with responsibility for assisting the faculty in implementing the model at the operational level. This group of lead deans and faculty members worked closely with the political infrastructure described above and also provided grassroots assistance to individual faculty members as they undertook their campus assessment activities.

What's Happened So Far

The basic design for the assessment model was developed during the summer and early fall of 2000. Once the outline of the model was in place and introduced to the college community, the lead deans and faculty members got to work on a number of tasks. The tasks included:

1. **Conducting an assessment inventory.** Recognizing that many faculty members had been conducting outcomes assessment for some time, the college asked each discipline and academic department to supply a brief description of those activities. The request yielded a rich variety of activities, some of which are already consistent with the outlines of the expectations of the plan, others of which could be made to be so with some modifications. Often this modification was the addition of the feedback loop wherein the information gathered was put to use to strengthen teaching and learning activities in a course or program. A second benefit of the inventory was that it showed many faculty that they were much closer than they may have thought to participating in outcomes assessment.

2. **Tying assessment to existing curriculum efforts.** Whenever possible, the team of lead deans and faculty worked with appropriate committees in the college to incorporate outcomes assessment into existing curriculum structures. This allowed the college to minimize having to reinvent the wheel in developing the outcomes assessment processes. For example, in recent years the college had invested considerable time and effort in revising its general education framework. This led to ten new attributes that were the center of this framework. These attributes provided a listing of core characteristics for degree and certificate programs. As part of this new process, in the preparation for the review of a course's attributes, faculty were expected to include appropriate outcomes assessment activities.

3. **Establishing outcomes assessment as a key institutional priority.** The college's administration identified outcomes assessment as one of the three strategic priorities for the college. Therefore, outcomes assessment became a major focus for the college's Planning Council through its funding decisions. Outcomes assessment became one of the priorities in supporting new initiatives projects in addition to technology.

4. **Providing for sustained staff development related to outcomes assessment.** The college sent a comprehensive team to an assessment conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the fall semester. This team included not only lead deans and faculty coordinators, but also other faculty members from across the campuses. Both nay sayers and champions of outcomes assessment were part of this group. Recognizing the important role faculty must play in this process, the college agreed to double the number of faculty it had originally planned to send to the conference.

   The college has established a staff development plan that is designed to offer assistance on a sustained level. It addresses a variety of staff development needs that are important to successful implementation. This plan focuses on a series of workshops to be held throughout the school year, and run by recognized outcomes assessment experts. Some workshops will focus on helping faculty conduct their assessment activities at the grassroots levels of their classrooms. Other workshops will focus on the ways department chairpersons, deans, and other academic leaders can support faculty and their assessment efforts. Still others are designed to address the broader vision for outcomes assessment and its larger implications for the teaching and learning process.

Lessons Learned and Suggestions

This major effort to revise the college's outcomes assessment effort has yielded many lessons that might prove useful to other similar institutions. They are listed below in no particular order, for each one of them has proven to be vitally important.

1. **Don't reinvent the wheel.** Build on what already exists in the organization. It does not even necessarily have to have been an assessment project for the pre-existing item to be useful to the assessment effort. For example, the OCC faculty coordinators saw that the college had recently been very successful in developing increased faculty awareness about how to incorporate technology into instruction by starting with small, informal groups of interested people and gradually building on them. In similar fashion, the faculty coordinators decided to host small, informal "teas" on each campus with other faculty members from that campus to discuss outcomes assessment issues and strategies. The hope is that these small gatherings will grow into college-wide discussions.

2. **Focus on faculty leadership for the assessment effort.** If it is to succeed, outcomes assessment must be a faculty driven enterprise. It should not be a top-down effort led by administrators. Instead, the administration should serve as a resource and support to the faculty members.

3. **Be sure to "listen to the voices."** In this focus on faculty, it is important for the leaders of the assessment effort, both the college's administration and the faculty leadership, to listen carefully to ideas advanced by the faculty members and to be willing to modify existing plans. For example, at OCC many faculty members are saying, "Just give me the template to fill out, and I'll give you what you want for the assessment project." On the one hand, this

may be a dangerous request for a simplistic and ineffective form-completing ritual that falls far short of effective outcomes assessment. However, it can also be an important plea for some clear, straightforward guidelines faculty can use as they grow in their understanding of what outcomes assessment really involves.

4. **Appreciate the scale of the project.** For many large, multi-campus community colleges, adopting an effective and a substantive student outcomes assessment model involves a major cultural change for the entire institution. Despite what we might like to think about the adroitness with which community colleges can be flexible and can change, this particular cultural change demands considerable time, effort, money, and patience if it is to really happen rather than just appear to happen. And it is this kind of deep cultural change that is implied by the NCA guidelines for most colleges.

5. **Respect the role of effective communications throughout the effort.** Keep the topic of outcomes assessment out in front of the organization. Don't let it be a bright flash on the college's horizon that quickly fades into the gray clouds of routine college functions. Instead, use visible signs and methods to remind people about outcomes assessment and how it impacts everyone's work. Use small-group and large-group projects. Have a sustained, proactive attitude.

Conclusion

The revised student outcomes assessment model at OCC is still very much a work in progress. However, with faculty involvement, sustained administrative support, and effective staff development, the prospects are bright for a successful outcome.

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Going Beyond the Data: Developing a Culture of Improvement with Part-Time Students and Adjunct Faculty

Carol Scarafiotti
Laura Helminski

The Rio Salado College profile challenges even the most creative thinkers when it comes to conducting assessment of learning outcomes and making subsequent improvements in teaching and learning. Rio Salado College, one of the ten Maricopa Community Colleges in Phoenix, Arizona, is a comprehensive community college that specializes in three areas: customized and unique programs and partnerships, accelerated formats, and distance learning. It is immensely successful, growing at a rate of 15 percent for the last five years, to the extent that it is now the third largest of the ten community colleges. However, it does not have a campus; most of its students engage in course work at corporate sites or in their homes. It has 680 adjunct faculty members and 21 residential full-time faculty members, most of whom serve as faculty chairs. It serves approximately 26,000 students annually, with 44 percent of these students enrolled in 1-4 credits each semester; 50 percent of the students are new each semester. Approximately 175 students receive an associate degree each year, while 4600 students receive occupational certificates. Furthermore, Rio Salado College's distance learning program has rolling enrollment, allowing students to begin most of its 300 courses every two weeks.

In spite of the very nontraditional nature of the college, the educational leaders at Rio Salado College are committed to assessment of student learning and to improvement of the teaching and learning processes. Over the years, we have developed expertise in customizing the assessment process to our unique college profile. In this paper, we will reveal some insights we have gained through our experiences that relate both to the design and the implementation of a plan for assessment of general education competencies as well as to the improvement of learning.

Dealing with the Reality of the College Profile

Dealing with the reality of the college profile in the design of an assessment plan meant that we would craft the assessment design and processes to fit our unique institution. Our first realization was that we would be remiss if we focused our assessment efforts only on degree-seeking students, since the majority of our students are part-time students who may never receive a degree from Rio. So we designed our assessment plan to evaluate the reading, writing, problem solving, and critical thinking skills of all students, both degree and non-degree seeking, and then designed a more extensive assessment for those who actually receive degrees from Rio.

A more in-depth view of the college student profile also helped us realize that within the two large groups of degree and non-degree seeking students were distinct cohorts that we needed to consider. For example, we had a large cohort of high school students classified as "able and ambitious" who enrolled in 15-20 credit hours of math, science, and languages over a two-year period. The reality is that these students will receive their degrees from various universities, not from Rio Salado College. But it was important for us to understand how well these high school students performed on college level competency assessments. Likewise, since writing is an important skill for students in our distance learning courses, we wanted to understand how well distance learning students wrote. So our assessment design included evaluating the learning of three cohorts: the able and ambitious students, those taking distance learning courses, and those enrolled in our in-person/accelerated classes.

Our understanding of the three cohorts also aided us in the design of the assessment implementation. For example, assessments of distance learning students were conducted online for those enrolled in Internet courses. For students taking in-person classes, we either administered the assessments during the class period or mailed the assessments directly to students.

Determining What We Wanted to Know About Part-Time Students

Over time, we learned how critical it was to explore thoroughly what questions we wanted to answer about our students' learning, but we also discovered that this learning came with experience. Initially, we merely wanted to establish a baseline that told us by cohort how all students were performing in competency assessments of writing, reading, problem solving, and creative thinking. After receiving our first set of assessment data, we decided that we wanted to look at the "value added" question: Does taking more general education courses at Rio result in higher assessment scores? Later we wanted to compare Rio's student assessment outcomes with student assessment outcomes from similar colleges. Then, after two years of assessment, we wanted to know the correlation of a student's assessment scores with performance in class.

Knowing the Imperfections of the Plan and Working with Them

In addition, we discovered that assessment of part-time students is messy and that it is better to have a workable design and plan with known imperfections than it is to hold out for a perfect plan that never happens. For example, we decided early on that we could not assess every part-time student, even though we knew our data would be better if we did. As a result, our assessments outcomes are based on sample data. However, when we realized that our sample would not be completely representative of the desired population group, we documented the situation so that it would be accounted for in the analysis of the data. We then vowed to improve the sample for the next year.

Recognizing the Need for Convenience

Part-time students and adjunct faculty members have several characteristics in common; they are busy, pragmatic, and watchful of their limited time. Therefore, convenience must be a main consideration when they are involved. As a case in point, distance learning students take their assessments in a distance learning format. Adjunct faculty members teaching at remote sites who are involved in the distribution and collection of assessments receive packets with easy-to-follow instructions that can be mailed back to the college in pre-stamped mailers. We also have couriers deliver and retrieve some of the assessment packets.

If we knew that the assessment process would inconvenience a student or faculty member, we were willing to pay for their participation. That is, when we wanted students to come to Rio to take a five-hour standardized examination that was not class-related, we paid them to do so.

Including Adjunct Faculty Members in the Planning of the Assessment Design

Adjunct faculty members offer us invaluable insight into the design and implementation process because they often understand better than we the needs of adjunct faculty members and part-time students. They participate in the design of the faculty-developed program level assessment instruments and department level exams, in data analysis discussions in their departments, and in design of interventions and improvements in curriculum and teaching and learning strategies.

In August 2000, more than 200 adjunct faculty members attended the Fall Semester All Faculty Meeting and participated in a dialogue activity on assessment. Students also joined in discussions that answered the questions: (1) How can we increase the incidence of college level skills being used in student classwork? (2) What is the faculty member's responsibility for expecting and requiring college level skills to be used? (3) Given that we want to set high expectations, what are some barriers to making this happen?

Removing the Fear Factor from Assessment by Focusing on Improvement of Student Learning

All of our faculty members appreciate Rio's philosophy that assessment data should be "fear free." Data are not used to judge faculty performance; instead, they are used to improve the curriculum and to improve teaching and learning.

The data help faculty chairs and adjunct faculty members focus discussions on curriculum, course lesson assignments, textbook selection, department exams, and specific teaching and learning strategies for specific student cohorts.

Adjunct faculty members see value in the assessment process when they are aware of its direct application to improving teaching and learning. Therefore, faculty chairs take pride in showing adjunct faculty members specific improvements that have been made in certain distance learning courses because of the assessment data.

Evolving into a Culture of Improvement

The college leadership recognizes that it is important to develop a college-wide culture of improvement that extends to all students and adjunct faculty members, but also knows that it takes a major commitment to do so. Consequently, the college leadership (with input from adjunct faculty members and students) has developed and is implementing a plan for developing a culture of improvement. Phase I of this plan includes a college-wide focus on a "big gesture" as a way of increasing attention to assessment and improvement. In Phase I, the student achievement committee selected the Rio writing competency as the emphasis for the 2000-2001 academic year, and the faculty chairs the cabinet approved it as a priority goal for the next several years. As a result of this goal, expectations for college level writing are stated in all course syllabi and in writing assignments. Students are given feedback about their ability to demonstrate writing above or below the college level writing criteria. The writing competency coordinator works with all of the faculty chairs to help increase students' writing skills in all disciplines.

Activities and training are underway for operationalizing other parts of the plan to develop a culture of improvement. Clearly stated and visible expectations and standards, shared values and vision, and high levels of involvement across the college are the basis for work on assessing and improving student learning. The faculty, administration, and staff are focused on understanding and cultivating this culture and seek the challenge to model those behaviors that are important to a culture of improvement. More information on developing a culture of improvement will be highlighted in our presentation at the 2001 NCA Annual Meeting.

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Stairway to Heaven: Continual Incremental Change in the Assessment Process at a Rural Community College

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Nathan T. Allen
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The assessment of student academic achievement is an evolutionary process that proceeds incrementally. Mesa Technical College is a small, rural community college that has been incrementally upgrading up its assessment process for the past five years. This continual, step-wise evolution has resulted in an integrated, multi-faceted assessment process embedded throughout the institution. Current assessment efforts utilize assessment at all levels of the institution (classroom, program, and institutional) and all stages of the student's academic progress (prior to registration, within semester, end of program, after graduation) and utilize both direct and indirect measures of student learning. The assessment process was singled out as one of the strengths of the institution by the NCA site team in 1999. This paper will emphasize the philosophical underpinnings of this developmental process as well as the practicalities of its implementation.

Mesa Technical College

Mesa Technical College was formalized in 1994 and evolved from Tucumcari Area Vocational School, whose roots go back to the New Mexico Vocational School Act of 1979. The college is one of three technical colleges in New Mexico and offers the Associate of Arts and the Associate of Applied Science degrees. Several degree programs offer certificates and diplomas. In addition, there is a certificate program in Commercial Truck Driving.

The college has a broad range of general education and technical programs as well as three distinctive ones—Farrier Science, Fine Arts/Bronze Foundry, and Natural Sciences—that have attracted students from more than a dozen states and several foreign countries (e.g., Australia, Belize, Israel, Germany, South Africa, and Brazil).

The institution had a fall 2000 enrollment of just over 500, with a diverse student body of whom 56.3 percent are female and 48.4 percent are Hispanic or represent other minorities. This is a good reflection of the multicultural character of Quay County, the population of which is 40 percent minority.

Mesa Technical College is situated in Tucumcari, New Mexico, a rural center with a population of just under 6700 within a county of about 10,000 people. The local economy is dominated by tourism and agriculture.

Philosophy of Assessment Process

The Student Learning Assessment Committee considered several options for an overall conceptual model for the assessment of student academic achievement. After extensive research, the committee decided to recommend the usage of the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model as expounded by Alexander Astin in his book, *Assessment for Excellence* (1991).

Astin's model emphasizes the necessity of consideration of what the student brings to the course/program, the environment of learning within the course/program, and student outcomes. These three elements are interdependent, and assessment of student academic achievement cannot be worthwhile without consideration of all three. The current Student Learning Assessment Model at Mesa Technical College involves a broad range of assessment measures, both direct and indirect, that are utilized at the classroom, program, and institutional levels and at all stages of the student's academic progress (Table 1).

Small Is Beautiful

The small size of Mesa Technical College is a tremendous advantage when it comes to planning and implementing assessment. The entire full-time faculty of 13 can sit around a single table and decide on substantive changes, and these can be implemented almost immediately. This ability to "turn on a dime" has allowed Mesa Technical College to adapt quickly in its assessment initiative.

Incremental Evolution of Assessment Process

Mesa Technical College is committed to the premise that the assessment initiative must continually evolve to flourish. Thus, the Student Learning Assessment Committee is constantly involved in a dialog with all the constituencies of the college to stimulate feedback-driven changes, for example, by holding joint meetings with the Faculty Council every semester.

It is paramount to the success of the assessment process that there are both feedback loops and incentives for faculty to participate. The Student Learning Assessment Committee provides a number of documents that facilitate feedback loops, including semester and annual reports on the status of assessment at the college. The annual report of the Student Learning Assessment Committee is presented by the Dean of Instructional Services (a member of the committee) to the President, who forwards it to the Board of Trustees, who then review it at one of their regular public meetings. The Student Learning Assessment Committee also distributes a regular newsletter called *Assessment News* that not only provides information, but also feedback from faculty. Incentives are as important as feedback, and each semester at least one award for excellence in implementing assessment is presented by the Student Learning Assessment Committee. Lists of award recipients are published in *Assessment News* and forwarded to the President to be presented to the Board of Trustees.

This process of feedback and adjustment has led to continual, incremental change and refinement in all levels of assessment at the institution (Table 2). For example, within the classroom environment, assessment strategies were first integrated in 1996. Initially, all faculty were encouraged to try Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) and pre-test/post-tests in one of their classes in the fall of 1996. This was such a success that the faculty voted to use three CATs and a pre-test/post-test in each course in the spring of 1997. Subsequently, there were refinements in these numbers so that all courses utilize one CAT per credit up to three, and innovative CATs were developed for nontraditional education such as distance learning and internships. Every semester, the Student Learning Assessment Committee analyzes feedback from assessment and proposes new changes. If these changes are ratified by the Faculty Council, they are adopted immediately, a luxury made possible by the small size of the college. Similar review and refinement occurs with respect to program- and institutional-level assessment.

Some changes in the assessment initiative have amounted to major paradigm shifts. Such exciting changes happened during the fall 2000 revision of the Student Learning Assessment Model. First, the committee suggested an adjustment to the college's mission and goals to include wording on student learning, which was ultimately ratified by the Board of Trustees. Second, the model was significantly revised to emphasize feedback-driven changes as opposed to the collection of numerical data on assessment. Third, the Student Learning Assessment Committee changed the name of the model from the Student Outcomes Assessment Model to the Student Learning Assessment Model. This reflected the committee's view that the word *outcomes* suggested an undue emphasis on product as opposed to process. Assessment is involved with all aspects of the learning experience, and the Student Learning Assessment Committee felt that the word *learning* should be substituted in the name of the model.

Maturing Toward a Learning Community

The assessment initiative at Mesa Technical College continues to evolve and has now developed into a meaningful and pervasive assessment process that is instilled into the institution fabric. Twelve defining characteristics demonstrate the effectiveness of assessment at the college:

1. Commitment to assessment is demonstrated by many factors, including a Board of Trustees statement in favor of assessment and the establishment of the Student Learning Assessment Committee as a standing committee of the college, the establishment of a budget line item for assessment, and many others.

2. Mesa Technical College has numerous explicit expressions of its commitment to assessment, including sections in each revision of the college catalog, faculty handbook, and student handbook.

3. The college utilizes multiple measures of assessment, including direct and indirect measures of learning.

4. Assessment is implemented at the classroom, program, and institutional levels; in fact there is assessment at all institutional levels.

5. There is assessment at all academic stages of the student's advancement.

6. Measurable objectives are in place for every course taught at the college, and measurable program objectives are published in the college catalog.

7. Numerous methods of feedback are a part of the assessment process at Mesa Technical College, including joint meetings of the Faculty Council and Student Learning Assessment Committee every semester.

8. Incentives are in place to encourage faculty to buy into assessment, including awards for outstanding proponents of assessment every year.

9. Data dissemination is a major goal of the Student Learning Assessment Committee and is accomplished through such vehicles as *Assessment News*.

10. Continuous progress in the assessment process is demonstrated by the numerous refinements that have been adopted since 1997.

11. The Student Learning Assessment Committee is dedicated to continuous refinement of the assessment process not just through annual reviews of the model, but also through changes to forms and procedures almost every semester, as documented in the semester reports of the committee.

12. Change as a result of assessment is central to successful programs and is demonstrated at the college in every Faculty and Program Assessment Outcomes Form submitted each semester.

As Mesa Technical College continues its journey toward a learning community, revision of the assessment process is the norm. Climbing the stairway to Heaven requires continual feedback-driven change. Are we there yet, Dad? No, but we are always getting closer.

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Table 1. Mesa Technical College Assessment Matrix 2000–2001

Nature of Assessment Measure	Level of Assessment	Timing of Assessment Relative to Students' Academic Progress				
		Prior to Registration	Within Course/ Semester	End of Program	After Graduation	Periodically
Direct Measures of Student Learning	Classroom Level		CATs			
			TABE			
			Pre-Test/Post-Test			
			Capstone Projects			
			Measurable Course Objectives			
	Program Level			Capstone Courses		
				Industry Standard Exams (CDL, AFA, CNA)		
				Measurable Course Objectives		
				Test of Critical Thinking		
				Course Sequence Analysis		
	Institutional Level	COMPASS		CAAP		
		TABE				
Indirect Measures of Student Learning	Program Level					Academic Review
	Institutional Level		Withdrawing/ Non-returning Student Survey		Alumni Survey	Student Opinion Survey

Table 2. Evolution of Classroom-Level Assessment at Mesa Technical College

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Faculty report on integration of feedback from prior offerings of course</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td colspan="2">All adjunct faculty and new faculty are provided with an assessment mentor</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td colspan="4">Results of assessment of course objectives reported to Student Learning Assessment Committee</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td colspan="5">Internships assessed through employer's evaluation and pre-post test</td></tr>
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<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td colspan="5">Distance learning assessed by pre-test/post-test and three journal reports</td></tr>
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<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td>Full-time faculty utilize one pre-/post-test</td><td>Full-time faculty utilize two pre-/post-tests</td><td colspan="6">All full-time faculty utilize pre-test/post-tests in every course</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td>Full-time faculty utilize three CATs</td><td colspan="4">Full-time faculty utilize three CATs in each course</td><td colspan="3">All instructors utilize one CAT per credit up to three</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td colspan="6">Measurable course objectives in every course syllabus</td><td colspan="3">Minimum of two measurable objectives in each course and no non-measurable objectives on syllabi</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Limited use of informal classroom assessment techniques</td><td colspan="2">Planning for integrated assessment in classroom</td><td colspan="2">Phase-in of integrated assessment in every course</td><td colspan="6">Integrated assessment in place in every course</td></tr>
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Chapter 12

New Designs in Higher Education

Assessment of Student Academic Achievement: Program Review

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Developing and Implementing a Process for Continuous Development and Improvement of Graduate Programs: A Case Study

David Overbye
Romuald Stone

Introduction

A fundamental mission of any institution of higher education should be to place a strong emphasis on continuous improvement of its programs. A key determinant of success in any graduate degree program is the ability to continually assess and improve program quality and effectiveness. Regular academic program reviews represent one mechanism for achieving these goals and objectives.

At the end of 1998, Keller Graduate School of Management (KGSM) committed to conducting a formal self-assessment and evaluation of all its academic programs over the next five years. KGSM currently offers six master's degree programs. We decided to start with the Masters in Human Resource Management (MHRM) program review, which was completed in June 1999. This process allowed us to identify strengths and weaknesses in our program and to target areas of improvement. As a result of this review, we feel our MHRM program will become stronger and will better meet the needs of our students as the recommendations of the self-assessment are implemented. It is interesting to note that subsequent reviews of the MHRM program self-study received glowing praise from numerous evaluators.

A Brief History of the Institution

Keller Graduate School of Management was founded in Chicago in 1973 on the idea that the most important components of management education are effective teaching and student mastery of practical management skills. The first class consisted of seven full-time students. By the late seventies, most of the school's nine hundred students were pursuing their MBA degrees through an evening program introduced in 1974 to serve working adults seeking additional professional business education.

To address its students' special needs and in light of industry shifts within the Chicago metropolitan area, Keller opened four suburban centers between 1975 and 1980. The first center outside the Chicago area opened in Milwaukee in 1983.

In 1987, Keller acquired the DeVry Institute system, providing an impetus for the school to broaden its geographic operations. Today, Keller offers its practitioner-oriented curricula in thirty-nine locations coast to coast as well as through its Online Education Center.

Keller's MBA degree was augmented in 1991 when the Master of Project Management (MPM) program was first offered. The focus was broadened in 1993 with the introduction of the Master of Human Resource Management degree. In 1997, a new Telecommunications Management program was first offered, and last year the two newest degree programs–Accounting and Financial Management and Information Systems Management–became available.

Becker CPA Review, acquired in 1996, complements the school's growing range of educational services. Becker is the world leader in providing preparatory coursework for the Certified Public Accountant and Certified Management Accountant examinations. Becker courses are offered in forty states plus the District of Columbia, and in eighteen foreign countries. It was recently fortified with the addition of Conviser-Duffy CPA Review, and now does business as Becker-Conviser CPA Review.

Overview of the MHRM Program at KGSM

The Master of Human Resource Management program prepares students to be more productive in their organizations by teaching concepts and skills needed to plan, control, and direct organizational requirements for effective and efficient use of human resources. As noted earlier, this program was added to the curriculum in 1993. Coursework is taught from the practitioner's perspective and focuses on applying human resource concepts and skills to real-world problems and opportunities.

MHRM students must complete fifteen courses, including five management core and seven program-specific courses–one of which is a capstone course in human resource planning–in key human resource functional areas. Three elective courses must also be completed.

The Purpose of the Program Review

For almost the first twenty years of Keller's existence, the only program the school offered was the MBA. Then over a relatively short period of time, the school added five more graduate degree programs. Prior to 1991, the school relied mainly on an informal process of curriculum and program review that involved faculty working with the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The first comprehensive review of the MBA program was conducted in 1994; however, no formal documentation detailing the process or changes was produced. The Master's in Project Management program has been revised on two occasions since 1991, but again no formal document of that process was produced.

The MHRM program represents the first formally documented program review. As the school grew larger in terms of students and programs, we found ourselves operating in more jurisdictions. Consequently, we find ourselves having to explain and defend what we do much more than in the past. Hence, future program reviews will have formal reports that are concise and readable by various reviewers.

Given the previous history and the school's emphasis on continual institutional improvement, we embarked on a formal process for conducting a self-assessment of our graduate programs that would serve the following institutional purposes:

- To establish a formal process for continuous improvement and review of existing curricula;
- To develop a working framework for understanding and improving the school's degree programs;
- To review program goals, objectives, and performance trends and relate them to the school's mission and goals;
- To conduct a comprehensive, reliable evaluation of the school's degree programs as a solid foundation for institutional planning and improvement;
- To assess satisfaction of students, alumni, and faculty with the respective program;
- To respond to the key needs and expectations of our current students, alumni, and stakeholders to ensure the relevance of the school's educational programs and objectives;
- To develop an action plan that addresses key short- and longer-term program improvements; and
- To strengthen the school's culture in which assessment of academic programs is a perpetual spiral of planning, implementing, assessing outcomes, and acting on feedback from our stakeholders to continually improve all aspects of the school.

The Program Review Process

A major objective of the preview of the MHRM program was the development of a consistent model that could be used in future program reviews. We thus had as a goal both reviewing the MHRM program and reviewing it in such a way that the review process followed could become a template for future reviews of other programs. Administratively, the responsibility for the program review was vested in the MHRM Program Manager, reporting to the Director of Curriculum.

Keller identified several groups of program stakeholders whom we viewed as critical. These critical stakeholders were the faculty teaching in the program, the employers of our graduates, and the professional societies that had as an objective the improvement of practice in the field. Faculty were involved in the process via extensive consultation; employers were involved via focus groups and surveys. Professional societies were involved via participation in their meetings and through examining the work they had done to define a common body of knowledge that presented the topic and skill areas needed for successful practice in the human resources field. We also conducted a comprehensive review of the research literature to determine the current thinking on the conceptual framework underlying the professional practice of human resources at the graduate level and how academic programs should best support that practice.

The conceptual framework that we developed substantiated and validated the basic foundation of our program structure, staffing, resources, assessment procedures and outcomes. However in performing a gap analysis, we did determine that in several areas the field had evolved in a direction that mandated changes to our program. One example of this is the increasing use of technology in the human resources field. The gap analysis between our existing program structure and the results of our analysis of current professional practice requirements became the basis for program change recommendations.

The final step in the review process was the preparation of a report that would serve both as a basis for the communication of program change recommendations and as a model that could be followed by other program managers in subsequent program reviews.[1] This report also became the basis for presenting the results of the review to the school's academic strategy group chaired by the dean. The presentation resulted in a useful discussion among the strategy group members, and ultimately approval for the majority of proposed recommendations to be implemented in the next academic year.

The Keller Program Review Model

The structure for our program reviews is based on the format found in Figure 1. The various sections were developed by using similar topic areas found in an institutional self-study as well as our own determination of what information would be beneficial for this program review.

Our presentation will center on providing an overview of each of the major sections of the study.

In brief, our study reviewed the history of the MHRM program, its goals, objectives, and structure. We also examined the institutional program objectives and how the MHRM program specifically strives to meet those goals.

A self-study and review of the MHRM program would be incomplete without a comprehensive review of the literature to capture the latest thinking on what university programs must offer to prepare human resource professionals for the future. To this end, we identified nine key sources of information and research that helped us determine which topics and competencies are the most important to include in a human resource management curriculum.

We next examined program performance and structure. This included an overview of the curriculum planning process, a comparative program analysis to see how our MHRM program stacks up to other programs in terms of functional HR competencies. We reviewed data related to program trends–enrollment history, course takers, and sections of courses offered per term.

Academic staffing issues are also addressed in the self-study. Topics include faculty credentials and skills, high-quality teaching, teaching evaluations and faculty performance ratings, faculty selection and training, and faculty meetings.

We also documented the extent to which the learning resources, technology, library, and institutional materials are sufficient to meet the educational objectives of the school.

Program evaluation was an important component of our study, in particular program effectiveness. We conducted an extensive student and alumni survey in March-April 2000 to assess student satisfaction with the program. Input from a faculty focus group was also included.

As a result of this comprehensive self-study, it was apparent that the MHRM program could be strengthened and improved in several areas. Five short-term recommendations to improve the MHRM curriculum and a long-term strategic plan with key goals were developed for the continual improvement of the program.

Conclusion

Regular program review is a critical component of any academic institution's efforts at continuous improvement. A framework for developing such a review for a specific degree program was presented. As a result of the program review model developed at Keller Graduate School, coupled with the involvement of key constituents in the process, we believe we now have a solid process for ensuring continued review and improvement of our academic programs.

Notes

1. A complete copy of the 130-page report is available to interested parties. Please send an email requesting a copy to rstone@keller.edu.

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Figure 1. Format for MHRM Program Review Report

Executive Summary

Section 1: Background

- History of the Program
- Goals and Objectives
- MHRM Program Structure and Content
- Institutional Program Objectives
- Consistency with Mission and Resources: A Summary Statement About the MHRM Program

Section 2: Literature Review

Section 3: Program Performance and Structure

- Curriculum Planning, Evaluation, and Revision Process
- Program Comparison
- Program Trends

Section 4: Academic Staffing

- Faculty Credentials and Skills
- Effective Creation and Delivery of Instruction
- Teaching Evaluation and Effectiveness
- Faculty Performance Ratings
- Faculty Selection and Training
- Faculty Meetings

Section 5: Academic Resources

- Adequacy and Quality of Curriculum Guides
- Technology in the Classroom
- Library
- Professional Librarian
- Applied Business Research

Section 6: Evaluation

- Monitoring of Program for Effectiveness
- Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
- Student Satisfaction and Surveys
- Current Students
- Alumni
- Faculty Focus Group
- External Review
- Program Strengths
- Program Weaknesses

Section 7: Recommendations

- Changes to MHRM Program
- Strategic Plan: 2001-2006

Appendices

- Appendix A: Content Outline of the HR Body of Knowledge
- Appendix B: Student Survey Form
- Appendix C: Alumni Survey Form
- Appendix D: Terminal Course Objectives for HR Courses
- Appendix E: Summary of Student Written Comments
- Appendix F: Summary of Alumni Written Comments

Musing Upon Our MUWSE: Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles Via a Model of Program Assessment

J. Anne Dvorak
Mike Warren

Introduction

Faculty members in English at the Metropolitan Community Colleges of Kansas City (MCC) have developed a programmatic writing assessment tool dubbed MUWSE (Multiple Writing Samples in English). This tool will be used as a model for discussing the kinds of obstacles that institutions can face in piloting assessment projects, in finding the means around those obstacles, and in utilizing the process as well as the results of assessment to change teaching and learning.

After discussing this particular example, audience members will be asked to complete a worksheet identifying problems with assessment in their own institutions, as well as any solutions they've developed so far. This worksheet will be the basis for small group discussions and an opportunity for feedback to the entire group.

Background of MCC

Our district faces both practical and academic obstacles to assessment. MCC is a system of four colleges (Blue River, Longview, Maple Woods, and Penn Valley) that serves the urban, suburban, and rural areas on the Missouri side of Kansas City. These colleges range in size from 3000 to 9000 students, and each college serves a large proportion of nontraditional students. Each college also provides outreach for even more specialized groups of students, including off-campus classes, distance learning environments, and special needs students.

In addition to the diversity of the student body, the faculty teaching English 102 use a variety of approaches to writing, from writing across the disciplines to a pragmatic linguistics orientation to courses in argumentation. Communication among faculty at the four schools is difficult, since the schools are a half-hour to an hour's drive away, and faculty members are frequently torn by other classroom and committee responsibilities that make even the scheduling of meetings problematic. While faculty have access to telecommunication centers for video conferencing, generally faculty schedules are so tight that teleconferencing becomes unfeasible.

The Process

The English faculty members at MCC have been engaged in programmatic assessment of the exit competencies of Composition and Reading II (English 102) students for the last three-and-a-half years. The assessment asked faculty to collect two or three final drafts of writing produced in their English 102 classes. Names were removed from these papers and replaced with Social Security numbers to preserve anonymity. Scorers were required to attend ninety-minute norming sessions to acclimate them to the rubric; then the packet of writings from each student was scored holistically on a scale from 1 to 6 by two separate readers, with discrepancies of two points or more going to a third reader. The data collected were reported to the district's English faculty at an annual discipline meeting at in-service, and data were also made available to faculty and administration in a printed publication. The preliminary results for the most recent reading show that the average MCC score for MUWSE was 4.0, "competent" by our standards.

Obstacles Before the Project

In the first year, we determined that the project was feasible, but there were philosophical and theoretical problems with identifying the project as a "portfolio" sampling, since our sampling would not fit the most widely accepted definition of a writing portfolio currently used in composition theory. In addition, many faculty were concerned about anonymity and the uses of the data collected, and others were resistant to the idea of being required to incorporate portfolios into their English 102 classes. Faculty members also wanted to make sure that the assessment tool used was fair and useful for their student population. In the second year, we revised the project to collect multiple samples. In the third year, the faculty problems became manifest, with concerns about the burden that data collection would present to adjunct faculty and with ensuring enough faculty buy-in to collect sufficient data and enough scorers to assess these data.

Current Obstacles

As the project has continued, the following remain or have become areas of concern:

- Data collection as a burden to faculty, especially adjunct faculty
- Logistics of communication, faculty involvement, and data collection
- Lack of faculty participation in scoring sessions
- Faculty burnout on the notion of assessment
- Problems with disseminating results and internalizing the data to change the program
- Inter-rater reliability.

Discussion of the Obstacles

The biggest discrepancy in moving from the pilot project to having a full data sample to assess has been the problem of inter-rater reliability, which has been low (.02) in the latest data we have analyzed. There are a number of possible factors that may have caused this problem.

- The increase in number of scorers
- The change in rubrics
- Reader fatigue
- Time elapsed between first, second, and third readings.

We are considering changes in norming and initiating discussions of readers' expectations for English essays to try to compensate for this problem.

Overcoming Obstacles

With time, persistence, and more publicity, the problems with communication, involvement, and data collection are abating. We formed a committee that allowed representation from all four schools, and these representatives are responsible for collecting data and reporting any problems from their colleges back to the committee. This helped solve the faculty buy-in problem, and removed some of the burden of decision-making and problem-solving responsibility from the chair.

Because the test was locally developed, it was easier for faculty engaged in the reading process to determine problems with our program and to start coming up with interventions even before the data had been analyzed. Faculty at one college who went through the scoring session have already recommended and changed the text required for English 102, moving from a discipline-based approach to an argumentation rhetoric to emphasize critical thinking skills more overtly.

Next Steps

Currently, we are trying to finish off a year's worth of sampling and engage in another faculty in-service discussion of what we have learned, both from the results and the process. We need to re-think both the norming and recruiting process for scorers in order to improve involvement and inter-rater reliability. Those involved in the reading earmarked the need for changes in textbooks, in writing assignments, and in the emphasis on and expectations for documentation within 102 classes. We need to disseminate this information more widely within MCC, especially to other disciplines as we continue to expand our Writing Across the Curriculum projects. The results of this assessment will help faculty across disciplines understand and anticipate the special needs of MCC writing students. Finally, we hope to ensure that future hires are knowledgeable about assessment and are willing to participate in the assessment process.

Workshop Agenda

- Complete worksheet
- Small group discussion of problems and solutions
- Feedback.

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General Education Assessment: A Course-Embedded Assessment Model

Sandra Flake
James Doerner
Richard Trahan

Introduction

The University of Northern Colorado has developed and adopted an assessment model for general education that assesses outcomes at the course level of the program. This course-embedded assessment model was piloted by two faculty members, one of whom chaired the team that recommended the model, and it is currently being used by approximately 20 faculty across the general education program in both skills courses and content courses. The model should be fully implemented by the end of the 2001-2002 academic year.

Context

The University of Northern Colorado is a general baccalaureate and specialized graduate research university, which will be classified as a doctoral research-intensive institution under the new Carnegie classification (formerly Doctoral I). The university enrolls more than 10,000 students and provides a wide array of undergraduate programs in five colleges: Arts and Sciences, Education, Health and Human Sciences, Monfort College of Business, and Performing and Visual Arts. Master's and focused doctoral programs, often in applied and professional areas, are offered in all of the colleges except the Monfort College of Business. The historic mission of Northern Colorado has focused on teacher preparation, with 2500 students currently enrolled in teacher preparation programs. In addition, several of the graduate programs reflect the legislative mandate that Northern Colorado provide statewide leadership in professional education.

The present general education program at Northern Colorado has been in place since the late 1980s and is a university-wide program of 40 semester credits–10 credits in skills courses in composition, mathematics, and physical activity; and 30 credits in the following content areas: arts and letters, social sciences, science and mathematics, and interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international studies. The program is the responsibility of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and is governed by a committee of the Faculty Senate, the General Education Council, which has representation from all colleges and from the three skills and four content areas within the program. The Dean of Arts and Sciences serves as a non-voting member of the council.

Limitations of Typical General Education Assessment Models

Many general education assessment programs rely on standardized testing of general knowledge. While standardized tests have the advantages of ease of administration, comparative results from one testing administration to another as well as among tested institutions, and global measures that relate to most general education curricula, there are several limitations to using standardized tests as primary methods of assessment.

1. **Unclear relationships between the program learning outcomes and the test.** Depending on the match between the test content and methodology and the desired program outcomes, this disconnect can be quite great. Further, given that most general education programs include choices of courses rather than a core of required courses, tests of general education content may be close to or far from the mark depending on the range of selection available and the actual course choice.

2. **Student attitudes about the test.** It has been difficult to get accurate assessment of student learning in testing situations in which there are no individual outcomes for the student. Students see a big disconnect between a test they are required to take for institutional assessment purposes and those that advance their grades, admission to professional or graduate programs, or scholarship or achievement recognition.

3. **Difficulty in linking test results to improvements in the program.** The feedback loop, using assessment to improve the program, is the primary justification for outcomes assessment. It is generally quite difficult to connect test results with specific programmatic changes, in part because the results are often more global. For example, even when scores of common sub-areas of general education, such as the social sciences, are available, relating the results to a specific course, e.g., economics, is difficult. Going the next step to improving the learning outcomes for students who complete the specific course is even more difficult.

Assessment models additionally rely on student surveys, alumni surveys, focus groups, and the like. These secondary measures can be helpful in assessing attitude, carryover of knowledge, and even perceptions of program rigor, but they do not assess actual learning outcomes. At the University of Northern Colorado, for example, in addition to a standardized test, the former assessment model included a course review process that assessed student opinion on whether the course met the general education criteria for the area (e.g., social science, arts and letters, composition, etc.) and whether the course syllabus reflected attention to the criteria and learning outcomes, but did not assess the actual learning.

Additional factors can influence the effectiveness of general education assessment. First, general education courses can serve more than one academic program and, therefore, have competing assessment goals, which can create difficulty for faculty teaching the course as they try to assign priority to various student outcomes. For example, the major/discipline will have expectations for specific student learning outcomes, the general education program will have expectations for specific student learning outcomes, and other programs requiring the general education course (such as teacher education) will have expectations for specific student learning outcomes.

The second issue is the one of accountability. Members of the governing body for general education, which at Northern Colorado is the general education Council, are usually elected, and the makeup of the body changes. That can lead to issues of continuity and changing commitment to assessing student outcomes.

Faculty Involvement in General Education Assessment

Many of us working in higher education would agree that, for a general education assessment program to be successful, it needs to be faculty driven and governed. Faculty at Northern Colorado are directly involved in the formation and implementation of the general education assessment program. However, faculty involvement in the assessment of the general education program has yet to generate widespread acceptance. Many faculty resist involvement because they believe that course-embedded assessment will result in an increase in their workload. Still others remain unenthusiastic because they feel that general education assessment is a passing fad and will not be sustained as council leadership and/or administrations change.

In order to gain faculty acceptance of the new general education assessment model, a series of workshops was conducted during the fall semester of 2000. Faculty members who have piloted the model and members of the general education Council who were familiar with the model led the workshops. The faculty who participated in the training agreed to use the model in their general education classes during the spring 2001 semester, after which these faculty will serve as mentors to other faculty members as they begin to implement the model in their respective classes. We suggest that the general education assessment model will gain widespread faculty acceptance because it was designed and implemented by faculty teaching in the general education program. In addition, course-embedded assessment provides the faculty with immediate feedback concerning student performance on general education learning outcomes, and the instructor can use that feedback to reorganize or restructure the course. Finally, the instructor can evaluate the assessment tasks used to measure student performance and make appropriate changes.

The Role of Administration in General Education Assessment

On most campuses, general education oversight and responsibility is assigned either to a dean or an academic affairs administrator, but the governance of the program is assigned to a faculty committee. As has been noted, the attitude of faculty about assessment has often been skeptical. If a general education assessment program is to lead to programmatic improvement resulting from assessment, faculty must, at minimum, be participants in assessment planning and administration, and ideally, they should lead it. That means that they need to have the support to explore assessment options, propose models, and pilot and implement them. If programmatic change is to work, even when time constraints are critical, faculty involvement cannot be overlooked.

At Northern Colorado, assessment planning and implementation occur at the college level, with a University Assessment Council setting standards and processes and facilitating information sharing. The Dean of Arts and Sciences has responsibility for general education and had three goals for the assessment program: that it would be a meaningful program leading to program improvement, that it would be developed and supported by the General Education Council, and that it would be manageable for faculty and administration. As a result, the dean can be an advocate for a faculty-developed model and a facilitator for its implementation. In essence, the assessment of general education at Northern Colorado has become a collaboration between faculty and administration, with faculty in a critical leadership role.

Developing and Piloting Course-Embedded General Education Assessment

During the 1997–98 academic year, the UNC general education Council developed and implemented student learning outcomes for all skills and content areas of the general education program. At that time, the council had been using the ACT-CAAP test to measure student performance. The CAAP tests were used to compare the performance of a sample of UNC students with the performance of students nationally. However, after reviewing several years' worth of CAAP test results, the council determined that the CAAP test was not the best instrument to measure general education performance expectations.

In response, the council appointed an assessment subcommittee to examine various alternatives for assessing student outcomes. The subcommittee recommended to the council that assessment of student performance be both instructor- and course-specific. The members of the assessment subcommittee concluded that course-embedded assessment was the most effective way to measure student performance. In response to the subcommittee's recommendations, the council directed a member of the assessment subcommittee to develop and pilot a course-embedded assessment model for the general education program.

The faculty member selected for the pilot began by examining his course objectives and the student outcome expectations developed by the General Education Council. Rather than create new performance tasks to assess student learning, he aligned existing assignments with the student outcomes expectations. The idea was to make the pilot faculty friendly and to minimize the increased workload for faculty. In the initial pilot, the faculty member used a combination of exam questions and a capstone mapping project to measure student outcomes. For the course (World Geography, a freshman level class), the general education student learning outcomes were: (1) the student will understand the framework, world view, or philosophical assumptions of the discipline; (2) the student will understand the methods and research skills used by the discipline; and (3) the student will understand the principal theories of the discipline. The capstone mapping project was used to assess outcomes 1 and 2, while a series of exam questions administered throughout the semester were used to assess outcome 3. (Note: in the second semester of piloting, the instructor dropped the exam questions as a measure of outcome 3 and substituted a requirement from the capstone mapping project.)

One of the challenges to making the model successful was to keep the assessment processes and the reporting of the results as simple as possible. Using existing tasks and matching them to general education outcomes reduces the burden placed on faculty who adopt course-embedded assessment. To simplify the reporting process, a one-page form was developed to summarize the results of the assessment. In addition to basic course information, the instructor reports the student outcomes assessed and student performance levels associated with each outcome. The instructor also briefly explains the tasks used to measure each outcome (i.e., exams, research projects/papers, presentations, essays, or class assignments) and the performance criteria used to evaluate the outcomes.

Implementing the Course-Embedded Model

Within the parameters discussed above, the implementation of the assessment model is the responsibility of the general education Council, but it is facilitated and promoted by the Dean of Arts and Sciences, with staff support. The new assessment model at the University of Northern Colorado is being implemented in stages for two reasons. First, the council is in the process of integrating the model with the course review process (adding the assessment of learning outcomes to the prior requirements of general education) and determining the guidelines for the range and frequency of assessment and reporting assessment results. Second, this is a faculty model, and faculty are training their peers to implement the model.

Currently, 20 faculty across the three skills and four content areas are implementing assessment in their general education courses. They will serve as training leaders in workshops to extend the program across the full range of general education courses over the following academic year. By phasing in the model beginning with interested volunteers, those least committed to the idea of assessment will, at the stage of full implementation, have a range of models from prior use available to them as well as good support from their peers. Finally, staged implementation allows for adjustments to address unforeseen issues as they occur and to have the benefit of that knowledge in the next stage. The goal of the general education Council is to reach full implementation through encouragement and persuasion, though the council has the power to require implementation and to remove courses from general education if they are not assessed. Members of the council believe that those who participate will see a direct benefit in their classrooms and become advocates of local control of assessment at the course level.

General Education Assessment Integrated with Program Review

In order to systematize and increase the impact of assessment on programs, assessment has been integrated into the program review process at the University of Northern Colorado. The state of Colorado requires a program review of all academic programs at least once every five years. Historically, this review had been focused on degree-granting programs. The decision to add general education to the program review process placed general education into a calendar of specific review procedures that established a program of activities and served to fix accountability for program planning and review and student outcomes assessment.

Program review at Northern Colorado is focused on assisting programs with improving educational quality within the context of the principles identified by the university role and mission statement as well as the University Plan. The first step in the process is the identification of an external consultant who visits the campus prior to the development of a program self-study and whose report is responded to as part of the self-study. The program review process then moves to a program self-study that addresses a range of topics, including program background and characteristics, program goals and objectives, and undergraduate and graduate program performance and achievement through such means as analysis, goal setting, resource identification, faculty participation, and outcomes assessment. Following completion of the self-study, a Program Review Committee of faculty develops an initial report and recommendations. Following review and discussion with the Program Review Committee and college administration, the dean submits a final report and recommendations for the next five years.

Beginning in 1998, student outcomes assessment data and the use of various measures for obtaining student feedback, including surveys and student focus groups, became an integral part of the departmental self-study process. The self-study must include a report on assessment data and on the programmatic changes over the past five years resulting from outcomes assessment. Additionally, the self-study may include recommendations for revision to the Student Outcomes Assessment Plan, which are then reviewed through college procedures. In addition, to maintain an ongoing focus on assessment, each program must provide annual updates on program review recommendations, including annual profiles of assessment activities and programmatic change.

Prior to the inclusion of general education in the program review process, assessment was less systematic and the role and timing of assessment activities for faculty elected to the general education Council was not well developed. By placing the general education assessment process into the program review framework, the assessment process became part of an organized structure of institutional expectations regarding the assessment of student outcomes for program improvement. Requiring significant faculty involvement and the evaluation of an outside reviewer provided grassroots ownership to the assessment process that moved it away from a top-down analysis. At the same time, the formal recommendation process provided the university community and the administration consideration of resource issues for program improvement from academic planning and budgeting activities.

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General Education Assessment: A Multilevel Approach at Northern Illinois University

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Like many other institutions, Northern Illinois University has been wrestling with the assessment of its general education program for a decade. Following the North Central Association's regional assessment seminars in 1991, the General Education Committee (GEC), a faculty committee responsible for the content and quality of the general education program, began talking about how to improve the evaluation of student learning in the program. A review process for individual courses in the general education program was already in place, but this review did not seem to capture the richness of the program in its entirety, nor did it address all the goals of the program. As a result of these early conversations, the GEC concluded that it was unable to develop better assessment tools until the mission, goals, and philosophy of the program were clearly understood.

The committee's next step was to embark on a multi-year self study beginning in January 1993. Various models of general education were explored; faculty and students were asked their perceptions of the goals for general education; the curriculum of and advisement for the program were examined; and a number of improvements were made:

1. A general education mission statement was developed.
2. The general education program goals were clarified and were restated in terms of student outcomes.
3. A philosophical definition of general education that differentiates a course acceptable for general education credit from other courses in the curriculum was written.
4. The guidelines for submission of a course for general education credit and for the review of existing courses were revised.
5. A list of possible assessment tools at the course level, across courses, and program-wide was compiled.
6. Recommendations were made regarding the structure of the general education program (e.g., course clustering, writing intensive courses, capstone experiences).

This session will address how those improvements were implemented, particularly how the assessment of general education has evolved since the committee completed its review. In most cases, the impact of general education is difficult to assess because students select general education courses from a broad menu of available classes; they may take their course work at more than one institution; and they take the courses at different times throughout their baccalaureate experience. The GEC believes that a multilevel approach to general education assessment addresses some of the issues associated with the variations in course-taking patterns that result in individualized general education experiences.

General education is an integral part of Northern Illinois University's baccalaureate experience. Although students are free to select from a broad menu of general education courses to meet university requirements, these requirements are divided into core competency and distributive studies areas, which include the humanities and the arts, the sciences and mathematics, the social sciences, and interdisciplinary studies. The types of courses and the number of semester hours required in the core competency and distributive studies areas are prescribed. The total number of courses available for general education credit is not limited, but a rigorous evaluation of courses included in the general education program is conducted.

The GEC is charged with the responsibility for ensuring that the goals of the general education program are met. The committee discharges its responsibility by assessing the general education program as a whole as well as the constellation of courses that comprise it. The committee reviews proposals for new courses on an ongoing basis and reevaluates existing courses in the core competency and distributive studies areas on a rotating schedule over an eight-year cycle.

Assessment initiatives at each level–course, program, or university–are often complex and are usually met with resistance from many faculty; therefore, success in implementing assessment activities must be linked to a positive outcome for those involved. The GEC has taken the approach that assessment activities should help faculty learn about how their courses fit into the general education program and generate innovative measures to examine whether students are developing basic skills. Because the university does not have a day designed for assessment of learning outcomes, it must be integrated into the structure of existing courses. Support for these assessment activities and the education of faculty about the value of assessment for the improvement of teaching and learning requires ongoing efforts. Modifying the academic atmosphere associated with assessment activities is paramount if the process, at each level, is to achieve higher standards.

Northern Illinois University's diverse student population brings other important assessment issues, such as pedagogy, multiculturalism, and honors requirements, to light. The GEC believes that faculty who teach courses in the program should describe the teaching methods and techniques used to address the different learning styles, values, and experiences of students and to improve information transfer to all students. Each course also must "promote a multicultural perspective" and demonstrate how it "addresses the university objective of increasing the understanding of diverse cultural heritages." Assessing these course-related issues is often difficult because the terms *multiculturalism* and *diversity* can have different meanings to different individuals. Northern Illinois University is in the process of developing a comprehensive statement that will be used to assess whether these issues are being addressed. Uniform standards also need to be established in honors sections of general education courses so that students understand what will be expected of them when they take these courses. The GEC must rely on the expertise of others on campus to guide their actions in addressing these issues.

Course-Level Assessment

In its review of individual courses in the general education program, the GEC requires course objectives to be linked to the goals of the program, and the assessment of students' performance in the course to provide evidence of progress toward goal attainment. To assist the committee in evaluating the appropriateness of courses submitted or resubmitted for the program, the GEC developed a new set of guidelines and materials for the faculty. The materials include examples of methods appropriate for the assessment of both course objectives and program goals. Faculty use these resources to prepare course proposals that clearly delineate the articulation of course objectives with program goals and the use of in-course assessment methods that will produce evidence of student learning outcomes. The committee also reviews the course syllabus to determine whether the general education goals associated with a course are being highlighted in the content and teaching/learning activities of the course. The emphasis on outcomes assessment has required the committee to become involved in outreach activities, and committee members serve as consultants to faculty members, assisting them in the preparation of their course proposals. In addition, the university has allocated resources to support faculty who are interested in developing new and innovative assessment methods for their general education courses.

In an effort to help faculty in their submission of courses for inclusion in the general education program or in their periodic review documentation, many samples, examples, suggestions, and ideas for assessment methods have been made available. The most current resource tool is a set of instructions for developing course-level assessment. The document provides step-by-step instructions and examples on matching course objectives to general education goals; identifying the cognitive functioning students use to achieve the objectives; defining types of assessment tools that evaluate across different levels of cognitive functioning; evaluating whether the existing evaluation tools are sufficient to provide evidence that the goals of general education are indeed being met; and describing how the assessment findings are used to improve the course.

Across-Course Assessment

To assess the general education program as a whole, the GEC designed a survey for faculty teaching courses in the program. The purpose of the survey is to determine how the learning objectives of the courses currently included in the program contribute to its goals. Rather than wait for a full eight-year review cycle of courses to occur, the committee will use the survey information to construct a matrix plotting course objectives against general education goals. The matrix will assist in highlighting areas of strength (i.e., goals are more than adequately met) and weakness (i.e., goals are partially or not met by an adequate number of courses) across the entire program. The committee will use the matrix in determining whether newly proposed or resubmitted courses would enhance the overall program and to identify where the program should allocate its resources in the future or solicit proposals to eliminate or minimize inadequacies. This across-course assessment is important because it will allow the committee to continuously improve the quality of the overall program, which can ultimately improve student learning outcomes and provide a more worthwhile baccalaureate experience.

University-Level Assessment

Over the last several years, four initiatives have been implemented to assess the outcomes of general education. As one component of the assessment of general education goals, the university initiated a junior-year writing project in 1999. Departments preparing for program review or professional accreditation are invited to participate each year, and other programs can also elect to participate in the project. Students in junior-level courses in the programs are asked to produce a writing sample based on project criteria. These writing samples are read by faculty from the Department of English using a holistic grading rubric to assess defined aspects of writing competency. Individual feedback on performance is given to each student, and information on the student cohorts is sent to the participating programs to augment their assessment data.

To date more than 1200 students have participated in this project. The results of the project show an overall satisfactory level of writing competency among the junior-level cohorts, but wide variance in competency among individual students. The project has resulted in the creation of a writing prompt applicable to students in all undergraduate programs, the development of junior-level writing criteria, and the recognition that the qualitative as well as the quantitative analysis of writing samples provides the richest assessment of students' attainment of this core competency. Coordinating this ongoing project with the program review process is expected to give a university-wide picture of students' writing ability over time.

In fall 2000, two new initiatives to assist in assessing the attainment of general education goals were implemented. With new state funding, Northern Illinois University was able to offer faculty the opportunity to create or refine capstone experiences within their programs or to engage in training to develop and use student portfolios to provide evidence of learning outcomes. Stipends are available to faculty who are interested in developing a culminating experience within their degree program, or in thoroughly revising an existing capstone course. Many degree programs already have such experiences in the form of courses, team experiences, field placements, or supervised practica. Some experiences are very good, with assessments in place for evaluating the broad goals of the program. Other degree programs either have not yet developed capstone courses, or have not clearly associated their capstone course objectives with general education or program goals.

Portfolio training will enable faculty to design student portfolios in a variety of approaches that include web-based, CD-ROM, or paper formats. The portfolios can be used to document learning outcomes in the degree program. Both initiatives must be designed to provide evidence that the broad goals of the baccalaureate experience, particularly general education objectives, such as writing, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, an appreciation for multiculturalism, or the use of technology, are being met. Samples of these indicators will be collected as indirect evidence of the extent to which students have achieved the goals of general education by their senior year.

In spring 2001 the university will also undertake the assessment of critical thinking skills among sophomore-level students. Approximately 500 students enrolled in programs in four colleges will complete the ACT CAAP Critical Thinking Test. This project will provide the departments and the GEC with data on critical thinking skills as students complete a significant portion of the general education program and begin coursework within the major. Critical thinking skills will be reassessed when these cohorts of students are enrolled in their final semester of study.

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Chapter 13

New Designs in Higher Education

New Designs in Using the Self-Study: Mission, Planning, and Institutional Change

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Planning, Assessment, and Budgeting: A Web-Based Solution

Joanna K. Michelich
Carlos Cartagena
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Introduction

> "The best thing for disturbances of the spirit," replied Merlin … "is to learn. That is the only thing that never fails."
>
> -T. H. White, The Sword in the Stone

Cochise College is a comprehensive community college located in southeastern Arizona bordering both New Mexico and Sonora, Mexico. The largest rural community college district in Arizona, Cochise College serves more than 10,000 students annually through its multiple sites, which include two comprehensive campuses, three education centers, a prison education program, a rapidly growing online campus, and numerous community education locations throughout Cochise County. Due to its unique location, Cochise College serves a tremendously diverse community, which includes a significant Hispanic student population at its Douglas Campus as well as highly skilled technical personnel associated with Ft. Huachuca, the Army's training headquarters for both Military Intelligence and Army Signal Command.

In the mid-1990s, Cochise College defined its institutional effectiveness model as one that linked and integrated its planning, budgeting, and assessment processes. Like many other institutions, however, Cochise College experienced a number of false starts, incomplete paths, and disappointing results as it worked toward implementing its integrated model. Faculty and staff throughout the institution demonstrated an uneven understanding of assessment; budget managers had difficulty linking assessment data to budgetary requests; and the institution lacked a comprehensive strategic plan. Since that time, significant progress has been made under the direction of new presidential leadership in each of the three areas (planning, budgeting, and assessment). However, it has been the application of technology that has enhanced the institution's ability to design a way of operationalizing the integrated model at the user level.

Cochise College's experience with developing a web-based tool for linking planning, assessment, and budgeting may provide other institutions with one means that has enabled Cochise College to overcome the disconnects between and among these three critical institutional processes.

Background and Context

Cochise College's history with integrating and linking planning, assessment, and budgeting might best be traced to 1996 as a result of a comprehensive NCA visit. While the visiting team accurately noted "the college expects to integrate institutional effectiveness effort, the results of assessment effort…, and other elements of institutional planning including environmental scanning and operational (budget) planning, into a single integrated system," it also noted that the college was "still struggling to define clearly the essential components."

Stating that the college met Criterion Four in "more than a minimal sense," the team also pointed out the most serious challenge facing the college as it sought to integrate assessment, planning, and resource allocation was the "lack of attention paid to assessment of student outcomes." In addition, the team cited the lack of "clear environmental scanning that gives direction to educational planning or budgeting," and indicated that program reviews "do not seem to make impacts on institutional budgeting or decisionmaking," and "levels of understanding among constituent groups about the college direction vary considerably."[1]

Immediately following the team's visit in spring 1996, the college was faced with major challenges on several fronts (changes in leadership and adaptation to state mandates being the most significant). The curricular and other changes occurring between 1996 and 1998 moved the college toward a greater awareness of the importance of student learning outcomes and began a much-needed updating of technology in support of both instruction and institutional infrastructure. However, it was not until summer 1998, when the current president was officially confirmed in her position, that the issues cited by the visiting team could be directly addressed.

Statement of the Problem

The problem was to link planning, budgeting, and use of data from assessment of student learning into a unified decision-making system, for the primary benefit of students, in support of the evolution of the college into a learning community.

College Response: Assessment

In fall 1998, an institution-wide Assessment Committee undertook a background study, which included information about NCA assessment expectations, a scan of existing data within the institution, and consultation with other, sister institutions in Arizona that had faced similar circumstances. To increase consistency of reporting, the college has used existing technology, in three different "editions" so far, with continued improvements in the works.

☐ First Edition

In fall 1998, it became evident that data were being collected, and in many cases being used effectively within units of the college; however, methods and use varied widely. There was little consistency over time or across the organization. Therefore, in spring 1999, Assessment Committee members, working with the Director of Planning and Research, designed a template in Access based on James Nichols' model for reporting data relevant to institutional effectiveness that could be applicable institution-wide.[2]

During spring and fall 1999, representatives of 30 different college units used this template to state their department missions, which aspect of the college mission theirs most closely supported, what outcomes they hoped to achieve in support of their mission, and how they would measure their success in doing so. Participants ranged from aviation and English faculty to maintenance staff and student services professionals. They were coached through the template individually or in small groups, usually by the chair of the Assessment Committee. Each approached the task from a different set of experiences and a different perspective, but all struggled with the format and the vocabulary. Most voiced skepticism that the statements they produced would ever be of much practical use.

Despite the skepticism, the statements produced and the thinking engendered by the process of using this first edition of the template served as an introduction to the kinds of linkages that were soon going to be required. In fact, even on this rudimentary scale, participants produced department mission and outcomes statements that addressed 17 out the 25 segments of the college mission to which their goals could be connected.

However, at this stage, the use of the template was perceived as serving only the purposes of the Assessment Committee, which were not seen as directly or meaningfully related to the routine processes of the college.

☐ Second Edition

By the end of the academic year 1999–2000, attention turned to reporting results for the current year and beginning the planning process for 2000–2001. A second edition of the template, updated in response to feedback by the previous users, was provisionally posted on the web for experimental use. The template, as then designed, could be used in two ways. Those managers who had used its format to present their plan for the year could simply "roll it over" into a report, add their results and their tentative plan for the next year, and be finished. Those who had used a different format for their plan were asked to use this format for their reports only, not to restate their original plan. Instructional managers spent an afternoon in a workshop seeing examples and drafting their own practice documents in small groups before using the posted template.

This experiment revealed several problems. First, some administrators, perceiving the template as serving only the purposes of assessment, backed away from this format and did not require its use, or required additional parallel reports from those reporting to them. Second, it became evident that budget managers varied widely in their ability to use a new web-based application, even a relatively uncomplicated one. Technological anxiety, added to the usual end-of-year stress, hampered use. Finally, flaws (especially ambiguities) in the template itself became obvious when it was presented to this larger group of users who could not be coached individually.

The most positive consequence of this experiment was that users emphatically communicated what was not working. The problematic areas of content and process were apparent from a cursory study of the results; with these new findings in hand, a team of assessment and web design people went back to the drawing board (story board) to produce a fully integrated system for use in the 2000-2001 year. This became the "third edition," the basis of our current process.

College Response: Planning

It should also be noted that during calendar year 2000, an institutional strategic planning process began; a comprehensive environmental scan was completed, a preliminary vision statement drafted, planning assumptions identified, community town halls conducted, and several planning retreats held. These efforts culminated in the senior administration's articulation of eleven strategic college-wide goals designed to guide the institution over the next five years. Thus, the prior concern about the lack of a comprehensive strategic plan had also been mitigated.

College Response: Budgeting

Perhaps the weakest link in the integrated model, the budgeting process, heretofore had tended to operate outside the planning and assessment processes. Budget requests were forwarded to senior administrators, at times accompanied by assessment data, but more often as simple requests for additional resources either to enhance existing programs or to support new initiatives. Senior administration was left to infer the value of resource requests based either on anecdotal information or on perceived value based on minimal factual information. In essence, although the relationship of requested resources to college mission and values was considered, references to assessment data and results were not integral to the decisionmaking. Effective with the 2001–02 budget development cycle, a commitment was made that all budget requests for increased or new funding would:

- be required to relate to one of the eleven college-wide goals, and
- be documented and substantiated based on assessment data (direct measures, indirect measures, or general indicators).

Web-Based Integrated Tool

Having in the hand the requirements of the planning, assessment, and budgeting process, we explored different venues in order to automate it. It became evident that adopting Internet standards into our project would optimize its value. We decided to conceptually design a system that would be user-friendly, dynamic, and database-driven.

With the project requirements identified, the web development team went into action. The team decided to develop the assessment web site using a combination of Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), ColdFusion Markup Language, (CFML), and an Access database. The project front-end (user interface) was designed following established HTML standards using FrontPage as the web design tool. On the back end, powerful CFML code connected to a database running on a ColdFusion server provided the capability to add, edit, and delete data as users deem necessary. In addition, it allowed the capability to filter users' access based on a security login process. This feature restricted the number of records that a user could view depending on the user's access level.

"ColdFusion is a rapid application development tool that enables the rapid creation of interactive, dynamic, and information-rich Web sites."[3] CFML is very similar to HTML and extends its functionality. The web development team found that, although this web site would be a very complex project, using Internet standards would minimize the impact associated with the implementation of a new planning, assessment, and budgeting system. The main benefits of these standards are the capability for a user to access the site from any location where an Internet connection is available and the institution's capability to keep very valuable planning, assessment, and budgeting data in a reliable and powerful database repository.

The concept (storyboard) for this project called for a user to enter a web address into the browser and access a login web page. After the user entered an ID and password, the system would load a web page containing the college's mission and vision statements and a text area for the user to enter the departmental mission statement. The next step was for the user to select the instructional unit, academic year, and campus supported by this record. Each one of these fields was based on the select list features afforded by HTML. Then the user would select one of eleven strategic goals that were developed by the senior administrative team. By doing so, the record would be directly associated with an official college objective that was part of the institution's long-term strategy.

The next steps would require users to enter supporting data, briefly explaining the following:

1. Department/unit goal: State what you hope to accomplish--your intended outcome or objective within your department. Identify up to three department goals. Please enter one goal per record.
2. Activities/strategies to achieve the goal/outcome: Identify up to three for each department goal.
3. Rationale: State background information and assessment results that support the proposed goal/outcome. Please limit your rationale to a maximum of ten lines.
4. Assessment of activity: How will you know the activity made a difference?

At this point, the planning and assessment portion of the process was completed, and the user was afforded the opportunity to input funding data if there was a need to request new resources in order to support the planning or assessment activities. This web form was automatically loaded to the user's browser the moment that the assessment block was completed, and the data were saved in the database. The web budgeting form contained areas for increases in operational funds, new personnel requisitions, and capital requests. The system would keep a subtotal tally for each one of these categories as well as total dollars requested for the record.

Users' feedback indicated that the college's planning, assessment, and budgeting web site met its original goals. They indicated that the site was user-friendly, was easy to navigate, had clear instructions, was fast to download, and was a welcome improvement over past assessment practices. The only problem some users experienced was forgetting their password, but resetting it was a very simple process for the site administrator. We plan on implementing some improvements for the 2002–2003 budget cycle in order to make the site even more user-friendly.

If you are interested in viewing and testing this web site, please point your browsers to http://www.cochise.org/assess and use "guest@cochise.cc.az.us" (without the quotation marks) as the login and "guest" (again without the quotation marks) as the password. We would welcome your very valuable feedback as well.

Results

We have been pleased with the results of our pilot web-based tool in its first year. Positive results have included:

1. Budget managers have indicated that the process was user-friendly and efficient.
2. All units that had not previously written a departmental mission statement now had to do so. Unit managers have self-reported that the process resulted in good internal dialogue regarding the purpose, mission, and goals with faculty and staff in their respective areas of responsibility.
3. Assessment became a familiar concept for some areas of the institution not directly involved in the learning/teaching process; several areas conducted fairly extensive assessments of their areas for the first time.
4. Administrators have been able to review assessment data with each budget request and have been able to rely on data rather than subjective assessment of the value of each request.
5. There has been an increase in budget managers' understanding of the relationship between and among planning, assessment, and budgeting.

Remaining Challenges and Future Use

Our results indicate that Cochise College still has additional work ahead to fully integrate planning, assessment, and budgeting, including:

1. Some tweaking needs to occur to make the web-based process even more user-friendly.
2. We have identified several areas of the institution that clearly need training about the purpose of departmental mission statements.
3. We found that differentiating between mission and goal, and between an outcome and an activity or means of achieving it, was difficult for novice users. Additional training will be necessary to assist managers in this area as well.

4. There is a definite need to strengthen understanding about assessment measures. Some managers cited unsubstantiated opinion as evidence; other managers stated "none available" when simple inquiry or search would have easily yielded facts to support their requests.

5. Having overcome the technological barrier, the next steps will be to develop standards for budget preparers and criteria for budget decisionmakers. Learning will take place through the natural consequences of reward in the funding of some decision packages and of rejection in the case of others.

6. Finally, the institution itself will need to demonstrate by way of budget decisions yet to be made that the process was utilized in allocation decisions. Because of the institution's budget calendar, those final decisions will not be made for several more months.

Conclusion

Using today's technology to implement an important institutional imperative has led to positive results. This presentation will include information on one institution's experience with designing and implementing a web-based tool to implement an integrated planning, assessment, and budgeting process. Progress on general understanding of the complex interrelationships and shared responsibilities for these three integrated processes is documented and will be reported. Managers' experiences using the tool will also be discussed, as will the next steps in its evolution. The presentation will include a live demonstration, followed by practice in small groups utilizing the elements contained in the model. Copies of the elements contained in the tool will be made available to attendees.

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The Self-Study's Role in Creating or Increasing Momentum for Significant Institutional Change

Karen I. Halbersleben
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Given the accelerating pace of change in higher education today, schools can no longer afford to put all other pressing issues to one side while they focus on re-accreditation. At small or medium sized schools in particular, leaders should craft a reaccreditation process that allows for an institutional review of honesty, depth, and integrity, but one that leaves human resources available for the concomitant work of constructing and carrying out institutionally important change. Buena Vista University (BV) undertook several significant, wide-ranging change initiatives during the two years it was also involved in its self-study process. To a significant extent, the analysis of issues generated by the self-study either created or strengthened the will to change in several key areas. Strategically, the self-study process and report provided timely and well-documented support for an important range of institutional improvements on campus:

- **Curriculum.** The focused analysis of the university's mission statement necessitated by the self-study caused the Chief Academic Officer to redraft the timetable for a complete overhaul of the curriculum, moving the reform movement forward by two years. The need to demonstrate that the curriculum supports the overall mission of the university provided a rallying cry for the faculty as they successfully undertook an accelerated two-year curriculum reform.

- **Personnel policies.** As the self-study accentuated the gap between the new reality of BV at the end of 2000 as opposed to 1990, the faculty's willingness to participate in a major revision of its personnel policies was strengthened. The document they produced effectively aligns BV's values as a teaching institution with its hiring, development, and reward system.

- **Distance learning.** Pressing needs for focused attention to the distance learning program emerged as the self-study pulled together, producing a significant reorganization of BV's 17-site Centers program as well as the development of key policies and procedures that clearly indicated faculty control of the academic program throughout the system.

- **Technology.** The chronicle of decade-long, leading-edge technological innovations depicted in the self-study gave us the courage to stay the course, becoming the nation's first completely wireless, universal-access campus.

All of these important improvements occurred at the same time the self-study was in process. We believe the reason so much significant work was possible—the self-study plus the reform work in addition to an already heavy all-staff workload—was because the university organized the self-study in a way that involved the entire campus but did not divert so much time and focus that work on other key initiatives became burdensome. The President's Council also announced their intention to use the self-study to establish key initiatives for the university, imbuing the entire endeavor with heightened relevance for the campus. BV organized the self-study using two-member team leadership for each criterion: a faculty member and a middle- or upper-level administrator. Each criterion team was charged:

- to use their portion of self-study to identify areas in need of immediate attention;

- to build connections between the findings of the self-study and major reforms that might already be underway on campus;

- to generate research questions on relevant topics. Survey questions were gathered from all five criteria groups and organized so that relevant questions were sent to each stakeholder group only once. Results were fed back to the entire campus, preparatory to follow-up focus group meetings.

The entire campus community could access drafts of the self-study on the Web; several availed themselves of the opportunity to submit amendments and suggestions. The campus participated at strategic points throughout the process, as they attested to the NCA team while the latter was on campus. Just as importantly, the Buena Vista process allowed the self-study both to be immediately useful in agenda setting and also not to soak up more human resources than a small, change-oriented campus could afford.

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Self-Study to Planning: Institutional Improvement by Design

John Mosbo
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Contexts

In a state with a population of 2.5 million, the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) is one of nine publicly funded institutions of higher learning at the baccalaureate level and above; in addition, the state supports twenty-two two-year institutions. UCA is the fourth largest in number of enrolling students and the third largest producer of student semester credit hours of the nine. It faces increasing competition for resources and students. The university has responded by more sharply defining its niche within the state community of higher education.

In this context, UCA began in 1997 to prepare for a self-study that would culminate in a site visit in the spring of 2000. This preparation involved the principle of universality—the self-study was global in its scope and depended on a comprehensive set of department-unit-process self-studies—and decisions about self-study design with that principle in mind.

The principles and design of the UCA self-study required a good deal of groundwork, beginning with the review and rearticulation of the university's statement of mission and purposes. More directly, the Steering Committee spent months on the formulation of key questions, on matters of schedule, on the formation of task forces—on, that is to say, the machinery of self-study. That machinery in place, the self-study director and co-director began a series of presentations with the aim of making sure that the campus was fully aware of the process, of its organization, of the questions driving it, and of the stakes. They wanted to reach—directly—every employee of the university or as near to that as was practicable. In a period of just over three months, they accomplished their goal, with presentations to thirty-six on-campus groups large and small (thirty of those in less than a month), including all academic departments, non-departmental academic units, administrative units, financial and physical plant units, and so forth. These presentations were supported by stories in the on-campus newsletter and in the student newspaper and by the creation of a web site making available information about UCA's self-study and providing links to further information about accreditation in general.

Mission and Roles

This groundwork and the subsequent products of the self-study process precipitated dramatic changes at UCA, with two major interdependent outcomes of the process and its products. Preparation for the self-study and the self-studies themselves made obvious what many had sensed already—that UCA's mission had gone out of focus and that its vision was blurred. Rearticulation of the university's mission and the consequent sharper focus on institutional vision served to differentiate between the institution's primary mission as a traditional undergraduate, residential, high quality institution and secondary roles driven by the flux of external expectation. Increased clarity of mission and the process of self-study led as well to a major restructuring of reporting lines within the academic division, allowing the provost to focus more clearly on the university's primary mission and, with the associate provosts and deans, to provide more effective leadership in both "main-channel" and "off-channel" institutional roles.

Main-Channel Change

Most dramatically, the process and its products has led to a reexamination of academic programs in light of institutional vision and statements of mission and purposes. UCA's rearticulation of its mission and purposes prompted a conscious clarification and development of institutional vision and a subsequent academic positioning initiative. Undertaken partly in conjunction with and partly as a result of the self-study process, the academic positioning initiative was (and is) an exercise in alignment with mission and resources.

Academic positioning is about asking and responding to questions—for deans, chairs, and faculty—about clientele (who are our students? who should they be? who are our other constituents?), about personnel (who is teaching our students? who should be? have we effected the optimum match of clientele and personnel?), about resources (are our resources being used in the right places, given our clientele and our personnel? how can they be better allocated to fulfill our place in the university's mission?), and about future directions (where do the answers to our questions lead us?). The initiative has thus far had mixed success. Where deans and chairs have recognized the seriousness of these questions and considered how this process can improve (and sometimes change) what they do, academic positioning has been successful: in some cases it has affirmed existing roles and in others led to substantial change. Where deans and chairs have had difficulty shifting from the growth mode of the 1980s and 1990s to the current reallocation mode, academic positioning has been less successful and at times painful, leaving these parts of the university in danger of stagnation, with no renewal in sight.

Off the Beaten Path

Outside—and sometimes in conflict with—UCA's primary mission, certain market-driven secondary missions exist: to provide applied graduate programs for the region, to deliver programs through distance education, and to meet needs for workforce development and nontraditional, less-well-prepared students of UCA's immediate community. Though institutional mission and priorities drive normal planning and resource allocations, external expectations not accompanied by additional resources require new approaches to planning and management. The university has, perforce, developed innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to meet these secondary expectations without redirecting scarce resources from the primary mission. Two new academic units have been created; one has been restructured; and business plans have been developed to allow innovative programming in areas outside the primary mission of the institution. Balancing entrepreneurship with institutional priorities has been achieved by requiring that these new initiatives be self-supporting. New initiatives include:

- ◊ Creation of the new Graduate School of Management, Leadership, and Administration (GSMLA), a separate organizational entity to house the Master of Business Administration, graduate programs in educational administration, and future interdisciplinary offerings in management, leadership, and administration.
- ◊ Restructuring of the Division of Continuing Education and development of a business plan for its delivery of distance education. In support of one of the division's off-channel responsibilities, the Director of Continuing Education developed a distance-education business plan to assume all costs associated with distance education delivery for UCA.
- ◊ Creation of a new two-year curriculum and student support mechanisms—a University College—within UCA. University College serves as a base for baccalaureate programs at UCA for less-well-prepared students, developing support services and curricula to meet student needs; offers students lower-division courses leading to an associate degree in general studies, or other associate degrees offered by the university; provides underprepared students with opportunities to achieve entry-level skills; and works with Continuing Education to improve employability and enhance career skills.

Both the process and the products of UCA's self-study have proven useful to the university, partly by design but also partly, if truth be told, by serendipity. The processes and products of self-study have provided response mechanisms and created opportunities for UCA.

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Self-Study and Strategic Planning: A Critical Combination

Clay Goodman
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Abstract

Estrella Mountain Community College began its first self-study in the fall of 1995 and received initial accreditation in the spring of 1997. The challenges identified in this initial self-study served as the foundation for all subsequent strategic planning activities and related plans. The lessons learned are helping to guide Estrella Mountain's current self-study (spring 2002). New challenges will be incorporated into an already dynamic strategic planning process that will take Estrella Mountain Community College into the future.

Introduction

Estrella Mountain Community College (Estrella Mountain) is the tenth and newest of the Maricopa Community Colleges, which serve Maricopa County, including the greater metropolitan area of Phoenix, Arizona. All Maricopa colleges are overseen by a Chancellor and Governing Board and are united by a common mission statement. Each college is separately accredited by NCA with a mission reflecting its unique community demographics and service area concerns.

Estrella Mountain was the last of three new community college education centers approved for construction by Maricopa County voters in a 1984 bond election. Estrella Mountain began as an educational center, sharing accreditation with Glendale Community College. Plans called for the college to seek separate accreditation once it reached a suitable size. The college began offering evening classes through local high schools in 1990 and opened the first of four planned phases of the permanent campus in 1992. The campus began expansion of Phase II in 1998.

As a result of its rapid growth, Estrella Mountain Community College Center sought initial accreditation from the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. An institutional self-study report was submitted to NCA and the Evaluation Team in 1996. As a result of the NCA Evaluation Team visit and recommendations from the Review Committee, Estrella Mountain Community College was granted initial accreditation on April 7, 1997.

Demographics

Estrella Mountain Community College serves a very diverse community of approximately 200,000 residents. The area is 55 percent white (not Hispanic), 37 percent Hispanic, 5 percent African American, 1 percent Asian, 1 percent American Indian, and 1 percent other. The service area includes a community with the third highest per capita income as well as five other communities with household poverty rates of greater than 20 percent.

Student demographics are as follows:

- 61 percent of Estrella Mountain students are female.
- More than 85 percent of Estrella Mountain students attend part-time (fewer than 12 credit hours).
- 88 percent of full-time students are under age 25; 69 percent are 19 or younger.

- More than 31 percent of Estrella Mountain students are Hispanic. This represents the second highest percentage in the Maricopa Community College District.
- More than 40 percent of full-time student equivalent (FTSE) is generated by students receiving financial aid.
- Approximately 1 in 10 Estrella Mountain credit students is 50 years or older (spring semesters). This is the second highest percentage of 50+ year olds in Maricopa.

Evolution of Planning at Estrella Mountain

☐ Historical Stages of Planning

Since its inception in 1988, strategic planning has been an integral and ongoing part of campus life at Estrella Mountain Community College. It has gone through several very distinct stages. The first (1988–1992) set the stage for the initial development of Estrella Mountain and centered on a set of six planning directions:

- Collaborative strategic planning
- Educational responsibility to West Valley communities
- Comprehensive instructional programs and flexible approaches to instructional delivery
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Integration of information technologies across the curriculum
- Strong linkages with public schools.

The second stage, Insuring Institutional Effectiveness (1993–1995), focused on development of the organization, institutional vision, values, mission statement, and purposes. This second phase built on past planning activities and helped prepare Estrella Mountain Community College (Center) for its initial self-study.

The third stage integrated the Institutional Challenges identified from the initial self-study into Estrella Mountain's Strategic Directions. These challenges were incorporated into the College Strategic Plan. The College's Leadership Council assumed the responsibility for shepherding the continued development of the institution's strategic and other plans. The Strategic Plan is intended to guide all planning and resource allocation processes including divisional plans.

☐ Focus for 2000–2001: Divisional Planning

Each academic and administrative division at Estrella Mountain is required to submit a divisional plan that includes linkages to the Strategic Plan. The Leadership Council developed a set of planning and process guidelines for use by each of the divisions that included common required components as well as recommendations for optional elements of the plans. The components include items such as divisional mission, objectives (linked to the strategic plan), summary of resources, and a continuous improvement plan. The completed divisional plans will be used as a basis for divisional budget requests and campus budget decisions.

☐ Participatory and Continuous Process

Estrella Mountain's planning processes are highly participatory. All employees are given the opportunity to participate and provide input into the various stages of the planning process. It is not uncommon to obtain a participation rate of 80 percent or more of employees in planning activities held throughout the year. Some examples include all-employee feedback sessions on Core Values and the most recent update of the Strategic Plan.

Strategic planning is also a continuous process. The College's Strategic Plan is continuously monitored and updated by the College Leadership Council. Council membership includes all divisional chairs and directors and employee group representatives.

Linkages Between the Self-Study Process and Strategic Planning

The self-study process is often overlooked as a strategic planning tool. A self-study can provide feedback to improve the planning process as well as update the College Strategic Plan through the identification of new or expanded strategic issues.

The self-study process has similarities to a common planning tool called a SWOT analysis. SWOT is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weakness are internal to the organization, while opportunities and threats are external and represent the environment that the organization operates in. The tool is designed to help organizations identify strategic issues that should be addressed by a planning process.

Virtually every self-study will identify a number of strengths and opportunities for improvement (similar to strengths and weaknesses in a SWOT analysis). The strengths and opportunities for improvement constitute an internal analysis of the institution. A well-designed self-study will evaluate these strengths and opportunities in the context of anticipated trends in the environment (i.e., legislative funding changes, demographic shifts, distance education). These trends are similar to opportunities and threats in a SWOT analysis. Challenges and recommendations that come out of this process should be incorporated into a college's strategic plan.

The authors contend that NCA's five Criteria for Accreditation are also closely linked to the strategic planning process. The table below demonstrates linkages to the strategic planning process as well the potential impact on the process.

NCA Criteria	Link to Strategic Planning	Potential Impact on Strategic Planning
Criterion One: The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.	Mission, Purposes (Goals) Strategy	Serves as a thorough review, and may result in changes to mission and purposes (goals). In extreme cases, changes to mission and purposes may cause the institutions to reevaluate the programs and services offered to its publics.
Criterion Two: The institution has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes.	SWOT Budget Planning Decision Making Processes Strategy	Identifies the institution's strengths and weaknesses related to all forms of human, physical, and financial resources. Provides an evaluation of the resource allocation process that may result in changes to budgeting and decision-making systems.
Criterion Three: The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.	SWOT Budget Planning Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment	Serves as an internal scan that can identify the institution's strengths and weaknesses related to achievement of the College's Mission Purposes. Identifies program and services that may need special attention in the planning process and require additional resource investment.
Criterion Four: The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.	SWOT Budget Planning Decision Making Process Strategy Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment	Identifies strategic issues that may challenge the institution over time. Provides an evaluation of the planning, budgeting, and decision-making process that can result in improvements to program and service delivery.
Criterion Five The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships.	SWOT Values	Serves as a check on the institution's integrity and values system, may result in changes to an institution's values and/or mission.

☐ How EMCC Used Self-Study to Foster Strategic Change

The first self-study conducted by Estrella Mountain had a significant impact on the College's strategic planning process. The College's 1996 Institutional Self-Study resulted in a set of six Institutional Challenges and 36 self-identified recommendations for institutional improvement. These challenge areas and recommendations were communicated to all college stakeholders. As soon as the self-study was complete, it became apparent the challenges and recommendations needed to be linked to the strategic planning process. The six Institutional Challenge Areas were converted to College Strategic Directions. Recommendations were condensed into institutional priorities linked to the larger Strategic Directions. These Strategic Directions and Institutional Priorities are intended to guide all planning and budgeting processes. Below is a table that shows the relationships between the College's original challenge areas and the resulting Strategic Directions. (Please note: Institutional priorities are not represented here due to space limitations.)

1996 Self-Study Challenges Areas	Current EMCC Strategic Directions
Institutional Planning	**Planning and Charting Our Future** *Estrella Mountain must fully implement a system of planning and assess progress toward its mission.*
Growth and Development	**Growing and Expanding** *Estrella Mountain must be proactive in meeting the needs of a growing West Valley population*
Community Involvement	**Creating Partnerships** *Estrella Mountain must continue to engage in partnership activities that advance the mission of the college.*
Organizational Governance	**Investing in People** *Estrella Mountain must continue to develop and invest in systems that support becoming a quality-driven institution.*
Strategies for Information Technologies	**Integrating Information Technologies** *Estrella Mountain must continue to invest in technologies to support teaching and learning the development of new delivery formats.*

☐ Challenges Incorporated into College's Strategic Plan

The primary goal of the initial self-study was continuous improvement through the identification of institutional strengths and opportunities for improvement. A candid appraisal of strengths and challenges provided the framework for the College to build on its strengths and address its challenges. The challenges and recommendations for institutional improvement were a natural fit with a strategic planning process. Challenges identified in the self-study were organized into six major areas that form the heart of Estrella Mountain's most recent Strategic Plan:

- **Planning and charting our future.** Estrella Mountain must fully implement a system of planning and assess progress toward its mission.
- **Growing and expanding.** Estrella Mountain must be proactive in meeting the needs of a growing West Valley population.
- **Creating partnerships.** Estrella Mountain must continue to engage in partnership activities that advance the mission of the College.
- **Investing in people.** Estrella Mountain must continue to organize and develop its human resources to meet the changing organizational needs.
- **Creating a climate for success.** Estrella Mountain must continue to develop and invest in systems that support becoming a quality-driven institution.
- **Integrating information technologies.** Estrella Mountain must continue to invest in technologies to support teaching and learning and the development of new delivery formats.

Other Impact on Strategic Planning

In addition to providing the basis for today's Estrella Mountain Strategic Plan, the 1996 self-study also had an impact on several other planning areas. Some of the changes that Estrella Mountain made based on self-study findings include:

- Update of college vision
- Redevelopment of mission and purposes
- Creation of core values
- Enhancing of institutional effectiveness and academic assessment processes
- Streamlining and clarifying all college planning processes.

Lessons Learned

☐ Need for Development of Continuous Planning and Review Cycle

The self-study can provide an excellent catalyst to improve college strategic planning. However, systems need to be put in place to ensure that the college continues to conduct regular self-examination and reviews and scans of the external environment to ensure that strategic planning remains current. The danger is that the ten-year accreditation cycle may cause institutions to wait too long to revise and update their strategic plan. The plan should be updated at least every three years and be reviewed for progress annually.

Estrella Mountain is more aggressive in its monitoring and review process. The Strategic Planning Steering Team and Leadership Council review progress of the plan monthly. The plan is continuously updated when changes in the environment occur, and it is formerly updated at least once a year. Environmental scanning is also conducted on an annual basis.

☐ Need for Strong Linkages to Decision-Making and Resource Allocation Processes

Without a link to decision-making and resource allocation process, strategic planning will not be effective. It is also important to communicate this linkage to college stakeholders because it increases the buy-in into the planning process.

At Estrella Mountain the Strategic Directions and Institutional Priorities guide budget priorities for the College. To strengthen the linkage between planning and resource allocation, Estrella Mountain is currently updating all divisional and operational plans with improved linkages to the Strategic Plan. These updated plans will be a prerequisite for all future resource requests.

☐ Linkages to Assessment Efforts

College assessment efforts should be linked to strategic planning and the resource allocation process. Colleges should examine how their institutional effectiveness, program review, and assessment of student learning result in requests for resources, improvement activities, and changes in practice. Estrella Mountain has made great strides in developing continuous improvement systems that result in concrete strategies and implementation; it is currently working on improving the linkage to the resource allocation process.

☐ Collaboration

Planning is less successful if it is conducted in a vacuum. A highly participatory process involving many stakeholders results in increased buy-in and understanding.

At Estrella Mountain Collaboration and Team Work is one of the college's Core Values. It has also been a part of every planning effort the College has undertaken. Most recently, the process of divisional planning has shown a need for interdivisional collaboration to ensure the effectiveness of the effort.

☐ Next Steps

Estrella Mountain intends to build on the success of its first self-study and strengthen the linkage to strategic planning. The College's current self-study process will be completed by the end of summer 2001. During the fall of 2001, the College will use the findings from the self-study to update the Strategic Directions and Institutional Priorities for the college.

Estrella Mountain will maintain its commitment to monitor, review, and update the Estrella Mountain Strategic Plan on a continuous basis. The college will also work to develop systems to ensure that ongoing assessment systems, such as institutional effectiveness and student learning assessments, have stronger linkages to the planning and budgeting cycle.

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Back to the Future: Using the Self-Study Process to Facilitate Institutional Improvement Through Strategic Planning

Charles Taylor
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In the midst of all the millennial hoopla, 2000 was indeed a significant year in the 127 year history of Drury College. It saw a change in name and status to Drury University. It also occasioned a visit from the North Central Association. Our challenge, beyond the obvious preparations for meaningful self-study and a successful site visit, was to capitalize on the momentum established by a decade long period of unprecedented accomplishment in order to position our institution for the much ballyhooed new millennium.

While we took nothing for granted, we were confident in the ultimate outcome of our NCA reaccreditation process. As a consequence, we were motivated to move beyond the minimally sufficient requirements of reaccreditation preparation to embrace an opportunity for campus-wide collaboration on crafting a strategic blueprint for the next decade. Drawing active participation from all campus constituencies, including faculty, staff, administration, students, and members of our Board of Trustees, our efforts resulted in a very positive site visit report and continued accreditation. Perhaps more importantly, we produced a detailed strategic plan with five action-oriented goals, a new commitment to working together to advance our institutional mission, and a deeper sense of campus community. In what follows, we will use our experiences as a case study to illustrate more general conclusions about the importance of meaningful strategic planning and the efficacy of integrating it with mandated self-study and reaccreditation responsibilities.

Looking Back: Drury University

Established in 1873 as Drury College, Drury University is an institution of approximately 4450 students. The traditional day school program for traditional students enrolls 1431. The College of Graduate and Continuing Studies serves nontraditional students, many of whom attend part-time. Undergraduate enrollment is 2507, and 348 students are enrolled in five graduate programs. Drury is a member of the Associated New American Colleges, a national consortium of medium-sized universities with a commitment to the values of the traditional liberal arts college while offering a larger array of programs than many small colleges are able to provide. Drury maintains a student-faculty ratio of 14:1 and places an emphasis on excellence in teaching and individualized learning experiences. Drury offers accredited programs in business, education, and architecture, and is committed to the integration of liberal arts and professional preparation in all of its academic programs.

The 1990s were years of significant advancement for the university. In addition to our name change, we invested significantly in new buildings and major renovations, including a state-of-the-art technology center, staffed 24/7. We added master's programs in communication, criminal justice, and criminology. FTE enrollment grew by 33.2 percent, and the endowment grew from $26 million to approximately $100 million. On one level, then, it is difficult to argue with the relative success of Drury's planning procedures, which have historically been coordinated through the president's office and which have integrated all vice-presidents and major unit heads. The proof is in the pudding, as it were.

Nonetheless, there was some concern that faculty and staff input, while welcomed, may not be integrated meaningfully into long-term institutional (read: budgetary) decision making. This had led, in some cases, to a measure of skepticism among faculty and staff regarding the utility of participating in planning processes. Inclusion is a key principle of Drury's strategic planning, but there was a lingering sense that while planning is ongoing, it was difficult to see closure for those efforts. In effect, planning was seen as just another "black hole" into which faculty and staff time and energies vanished. If, in fact, perception shapes (or overdetermines) our institutional reality, our challenge was to eliminate the disconnect between the two.

Back to the Future: The Self-Study Process and Strategic Planning

In the remarkably dynamic, even unstable, landscape of higher education, resting on one's institutional laurels is a recipe for decline. To meet the changing demands on our institutions, it is essential to creatively evaluate and respond to that landscape. The key, then, is to find ways of "arraying options through a process of opening up institutional thinking to a range of alternatives and decisions that identify the best fit between the institution, its resources, and the environment" (Rowley et al. 1997, p. 15). The NCA Accreditation Criterion Four Committee Report underscored the significance of this way of institutional thinking: "Continuous strategic planning that is future oriented, fosters dynamic programming and is based on sound financial and operational strategies is the key to maximizing the college's strengths and is a basis for ensuring that the college can continue to meet the needs of its constituency" (Drury University 2000, p. 5).

Dubbed "NCA2000" as a reflection of the integration of self-study preparation and long-term strategic planning, our strategic planning team began its efforts in summer 1998. Responding to a call from the VPAA to all campus constituencies, a team of 35 members met and developed a guiding vision for the future, "to build the best Collegiate University (New American College) in the region," and strategic directions that could make that vision a reality. Subcommittees (constituted intentionally with representation from faculty, staff, and student populations) were assigned the responsibility of crafting individual sections of a meaningful SWOT analysis that focused on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing Drury University.

While the SWOT approach has much to recommend it, care must be taken to ensure that a candid assessment is produced. Identifying strengths and opportunities might come naturally to a group of faculty, staff, and students who are committed to the institution, but noting weaknesses (easier for students than faculty, we found) and threats represent larger challenges. In part, ego involvement is an obstacle. Indeed, the subcommittee charged with identifying weaknesses initially rewrote their charge to focus on "unrealized opportunities" until they recognized that self-reflection requires scrupulous, if occasionally painful, honesty. Additionally, the relatively short-term focus of much staff, faculty, and student thinking (e.g., the next semester or project) does not lend itself easily to the longer term strategic perspective required. Judicious recruitment of persons with appropriate skills–when self-selection fails–is an important consideration.

Using the results of the SWOT analysis as a foundation, the NCA2000 team coordinated a series of focus group sessions with various campus units and constituencies. Utilizing trained facilitators, participants were asked to brainstorm potential goals and then to prioritize them in terms of overall importance to enactment of the vision statement. The sessions, which were held at an annual faculty retreat, staff meetings, and special student meetings (coordinated with the cooperation of Drury's Student Senate), provided multiple forums for input from across campus. This functioned not only to generate invaluable data, but also to reaffirm the sense of community we value across campus. The necessity for prioritizing the goals encouraged a consensual transcendence of narrow partisan interests for the larger good of the institution. In addition, new information technologies, including an interactive NCA2000 web site, were available for campus-wide input.

Five major goals emerged from this extensive series of focus group meetings and subsequent reflection. The NCA2000 group refined the language in which the goals were expressed into the following:

1. **To strengthen academic programs and add selected programs.** This would include planning in the areas of faculty (teaching excellence, faculty development, scholarship, salaries, increased technological abilities, etc.), student learning (increased focus on technological literacy and student scholarship), and improved retention and selective addition of new programs.

2. **To strengthen the sense of community (a learning community).** This would include planning intentionally to maintain and strengthen the sense of community, the traditions, the ways in which people connect, the student-faculty ratio, student-staff ratio, the contacts between students and faculty (with improved community and services for commuter students and nontraditional students).

3. **To increase the diversity of educational experiences available to students.** Consistent with GP21 (Drury's general education curriculum) and the mission, planning will focus on creating a place where diversity of persons and ideas is welcome; increasing international study opportunities and participation; increasing the number of international students and faculty; and increasing the number of American minority students, faculty, and staff.

4. **To enhance the integration of liberal arts and professional programs.** As a collegiate university, one of the strengths is the preparation of students for successful professional careers (the work of all majors), and that preparation is best when it is carefully infused with the liberal arts. The planning here will focus on developing distinctive programs with clear outcomes that achieve this goal–programs that are continuously improved through assessment.
5. **To provide the infrastructure to support growth and other goals.** To pursue these goals will likely result in improved retention and growth in both traditional and nontraditional students. Conversely, managed growth can contribute to the achievement of these goals. Planning will focus on endowment growth, facilities development, technology, administrative support, staff development, etc.

Action teams were organized around each of the articulated goals and were charged with developing specific plans for achieving the goals and developing budget proposals for submission to the administration and university budget committee. Once again drawing representation from all campus constituencies, teams met throughout the academic year, producing a formal, bound document ratified by faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees action (Defining the University, 2000).

Significant action has already been motivated by the strategic planning process and was evident during the September 2000 NCA site team visit. For example, the commitment to strengthening academic programs was realized in small part through the creation of a Center for Faculty Excellence. The Center, which opened in fall 2000 with a new full-time director, is charged with providing faculty development for enhanced teaching, scholarship, and service. Similarly, to address the commitment to diversity and international educational experiences, Drury has recently affiliated with the ANACSA (Associated New American Colleges Study Abroad) program. This affiliation increases Drury student access to well-established and intellectually rewarding international study experiences. In addition, discussions are underway about the feasibility of establishing a Drury University International Study Center in Greece.

The next important step is for the plan to become institutionalized, ensuring the perception of closure that has eluded previous strategic planning initiatives. Toward that end, the VPAA has begun the creation of a strategic planning council, to be composed of the president, four vice presidents, three elected faculty, two students, and three staff members. The council will be charged with:

1. Overseeing the development of specific budget proposals framed by the strategic plan goals.
2. Reconciling conflicts between the plan and invariably limited resources. This will include development of a long-range budget that supports the strategic plan.
3. Developing a pattern of regular review of the implementation of the strategic plan. This will include monitoring reports from those accountable for various aspects of the plan and providing feedback.
4. Participating actively in the budgeting process, prioritizing budget requests in terms of their relevance to the strategic plan and importance in the plan. While a number of individual budget items for AY 2000-2001 were products of the NCA2000 plan, this will be a comprehensive process for deliberations affecting the 2001-2002 budget.
5. Regularly checking the process of the institution against relevant benchmarks (appended to bound copies of the plan).
6. Regularly reporting in formal and informal contexts to the institution's stakeholders on progress toward achieving the plan's goals.

As work proceeded on the various dimensions of strategic planning, self-study preparations were also underway. Self-study chapter team chairs met regularly with the NCA2000 team, and the self-study steering team included members from the larger group. This helped facilitate efficient and meaningful information exchange. The self-reflective character of the self-study was informed by the significant data generated through the strategic planning process, and that process received important direction and a productive sense of urgency from the exigencies of the self-study process and impending site visit.

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Making the Most of Consultant Assistance in Colleges

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External assistance can be extremely helpful in moving an institution forward. Using consultants can often be the catalyst for colleges achieving the excellence and quality they seek. Consultant assistance can be a valuable educational resource; and, as such, its use deserves careful consideration in the same way any of the institution's resources (physical, financial, human) and processes are planned, implemented, and evaluated.

Any college can profit from an outside, objective view furnished by a consultant. If a college is small, it often needs to use outside help to get certain things done. If a college plans major changes or faces major challenges, it usually needs outside help. If a college has an outstanding reputation, a consultant can help it reach even higher goals.

Consultant assistance can be engaged through a variety of sources: recognized consulting firms, professional organizations, peer institutions, or freelance/independent consultants. And, even more varied are the general purposes for which the institution might engage a consultant's services; for instance:

- To help define issues, suggest approaches, provide third-party analysis of work in progress, furnish a point of view, or establish priorities for action.
- To supply a broad perspective on external trends pertinent to the growth and development of the institution.
- To identify other institutions that can serve as an informal benchmark or that have successfully solved similar issues.
- To audit policies and practices for congruence with or to distill core values.
- To integrate existing and innovative practices into a new, more effective framework.
- To facilitate group interaction or provide training regarding a defined topic or specific operational aspect.

Regardless of the general purpose, the consultant—as an outside observer—brings a fresh perspective and knowledge to escalate learning and action within the organization. Furthermore, the combination of external consultant assistance and internal faculty-staff expertise can be especially productive because of the range of insights brought to bear on the matter at hand.

Deciding to enlist consultant assistance merits planning at the outset and oversight during the process. The working relationship forged between the institution and the consultant can be as formal or informal as both parties find comfortable. Such assumptions will influence how the following suggestions apply to the arrangement.

Establishing the Consultant–Client Relationship

Any institution considering the use of a consultant is faced with many questions that are critical at the outset. Foremost are:

1. Why is the use of a consultant appropriate?
2. What are the expected outcomes of the consulting process?
3. How will the assistance be provided?

The answers to these questions should be formulated before initiating the search for a consultant to provide the service. In grappling with these questions, the institution may wish to consider the following approaches.

The use of a consultant is appropriate provided the institution retains overall responsibility for the issue or process for which assistance is being secured. While consultants can be an invaluable asset insofar as guiding and facilitating, they should not be responsible for directing a project. One key to accomplishing this is the institution's commitment to viewing the consultant's help as a formative tool rather than a summative one. Such a strategy is required especially if the consultant is hired to accomplish a task college staff do not have time or requisite skills to undertake.

The institution should clearly define its needs. The expected outcomes of the consulting process should be articulated in a written project statement that includes purposes and objectives. The importance of this step cannot be overstated. The expected outcomes will give direction to selecting a consultant and delineating the specific responsibilities of each party involved in the project. The format, schedule, and dynamics for the process as well as negotiation of the consulting agreement will largely be dependent on the needs definition. The productivity of the consultant and the process will be impeded in the absence of such a statement and the conceptualization it requires.

Selection of a consultant should address many of the same basic considerations made in the selection of new faculty or staff members for the institution. The project description, purposes, and objectives inform the consultant selection process in much the same way a job description serves the employee selection process. Compatibility between the institution's needs and the prospective consultant's skills is essential. The institution may wish to seek referrals from colleagues who have used a consultant for the same or a similar purpose. Interviewing three or four candidates is helpful in order to compare their experience, knowledge, and references. The candidates' ability to interact well and communicate results in writing is especially important for projects where the consultant will be conducting individual and/or small group meetings.

Other practical aspects of the working relationship between the college and the consultant deserve detailed attention during the selection process if misunderstandings are to be avoided. Obviously, fees, expenses, terms of payment, and what services will be rendered should be agreed on. How the consultant will engage with the institution, the timeline, and the form for the deliverables should be decided. Like the project definition statement, such details should be summarized in a formal or informal memorandum of understanding before the project begins.

Implementing the Consulting Process

Both the institution and the consultant carry responsibility for maintaining a collegial working climate throughout the project. Open-mindedness on the part of all participants is a necessity; therefore, time devoted to discussions among the institution's participants and with the consultant to "set the stage" is an investment in the eventual success and outcomes of the process. Mutual agreement about the respective responsibilities forms the foundation for the consultancy.

The institution should treat consultants as trusted professionals and be mindful that they lack the inside information crucial to understanding the inner workings of the college. The institution should provide an extensive orientation on its needs, furnish support materials at the start, and make additional needed resources available as the project evolves. The consultant must treat all information as confidential and not divulge any confidences that are shared by the institution.

The consultant should respect the college's statement of the problem or its needs, recognizing that institutional values influence the institutional climate and vice versa. The consultant must understand and be able to relate to the institutional culture, history, constituencies, current activities, and future plans. While the consultant can glean some of this information from written documents, the institution should encourage broad faculty/staff involvement in a dialogue with the consultant to capture their collective views and experience.

The consultant's most important contribution is bringing an objective view. Most consultants have visited many colleges and have seen processes that work well and others that are less effective. They can carry the word on good practices and caution against procedures that are less likely to work or perhaps even to fail. Their advice should not be perceived by the college's participants as an intent to reject old paradigms or to create defensiveness.

As an outsider, it is possible for a consultant to see contradictions, disconnects, or omissions in institutional documents and procedures that are not apparent to college personnel. Likewise, the consultant can observe institutional actions or decisions undertaken as a matter of course that are ineffective or inappropriate. Another hindrance to institutional progress with which the consultant can be helpful is the "we've always done it that way" syndrome; internal constituents are often too close to the situation to be able to identify the problems inherent in the current mode of operation.

Consultants can be more candid with institutional personnel than can people within the college. The consultant can express concerns that peers or leaders on campus are hesitant to verbalize to each other for fear of "rocking the boat." The consultant may reserve findings of a particularly sensitive nature for a special report to the president.

Designing a schedule for the consultant's time on campus is a natural extension of the project statement provided the statement is explicit about the institution's needs and desired outcome. A project coordinator designated by the institution should propose the individuals or groups with whom the consultant interacts in order to exchange information related to the consulting topic. For the most efficient use of on-campus time, the coordinator and consultant can collaborate about the kind and distribution of introductory and support materials that are needed in advance by the institutional participants and the consultant, respectively. Participants' comfort with the process and confidence about it are usually in direct proportion to their understanding of the project purposes and objectives.

Evaluating the Project

Depending on the length and scope of the consulting agreement, the college and consultant should periodically assess the progress being made toward project objectives. Feedback from the participating staff and the consultant about how well the arrangement is working can be used to make schedule adjustments or other revisions.

The institution should not view the consultant's report as the end of the process, but rather as the beginning of the second half of the process. The follow-up activities in which the college chooses to engage, based on the consultant's report, will determine the overall value to the institution of having hired a consultant. The institution's commitment to follow-up should be made in the initial planning for the project, even though identifying the follow-up tactics most likely can best be determined after studying the consultant's report.

On completion of the project, many consultants request that the client institution provide an evaluation of the services received. The assessment can be useful to both parties. For its completion, the institution will need to reflect on the project's planning and logistics. Such a retrospective can assist the remainder of the process and will aid in designing any future consulting arrangements. Good consultants will regard the evaluative comments in terms of improving their services; of course, they appreciate testimonials, too!

Over the past decade, Robert Morris College has planned and implemented a series of successful institutional changes, including the addition of a new degree level and new instructional sites. With the overall goal of achieving balance between quality and growth, the institution used consultant assistance as one of its quality-review strategies during the course of internalizing the changes. Consultants were engaged to offer constructive insights about diverse topics: curriculum, instructional modes, student support services, the assessment program, library resources and services, long-range planning, and faculty life.

Three stated purposes guided the project—dubbed the Institutional Quality Task Force—and the collective input garnered through the participation of faculty, staff, administrators, and consultants:

- To obtain an external perspective of the college's performance in relation to institutional mission, institutional viability, and commonly accepted standards of good practice in higher education.
- To identify opportunities for enhancement and suggestions for pursuing them based on observed institutional strengths.
- To furnish information useful to the steering and working committees in conducting the institutional self-study for continued accreditation.

The factors and general suggestions described in the above article were applied to arranging the consultant services and guiding the dynamics of the process.

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The Experimental Approach: Planning as Continuous Quality Improvement

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Introduction

Bemidji State University has long been engaged in, and has recognized the value of, planning in accomplishing its purposes. Like many institutions, it has used a variety of approaches to accomplish planning. Many of the approaches implemented over the years have fallen short of expectations in achieving the desired alignment between the institution purposes, resource allocations, and the changing environment. The institution has a history of uneven success in its attempts to initiate meaningful long-range planning. Rather, the tendency has been to focus on short-term operational responses to complex problems. The ten-year comprehensive re-accreditation visit provided an opportunity for the university, in cooperation with the North Central Association, to engage in an Experimental Planning Initiative as part of its self-study and site visitation process. Bemidji State University's objective was to develop and implement a strategic approach to planning. This presentation will focus on (1) the identification of shared commitments and organizational principles necessary for meaningful planning in a collective bargaining environment; (2) a description of the university's empowerment orientation in an environment characterized by change; (3) the identification of working assumptions through an analysis of institutional strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT); (4) a discussion of the principal structural planning recommendations; and (5) a description of several representative examples of the planning outcomes achieved as a result of the Experimental Planning Initiative.

The thoughts and developments that have resulted from the implementation of the Experimental Planning Initiative continue to evolve through a deliberative process that has encompassed nearly three years. Additional planning expertise beyond the university in the formulation stage was provided by consultants from the University of Minnesota-Hubert Humphrey Institute for Public Policy, the North Central Association, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU), and several other universities.

The Value of Dialogue: Shared Organizational Commitments and Principles

In collaboration with the bargaining units, a series of community-wide dialogues were convened with nearly every university employee. Members of the university's student senate, foundation, and alumni association; business; and community also participated in the dialogues. The purpose of the informal gatherings was to discuss university planning for the twenty-first century. The key questions that were an outcome of these discussions fit very closely with the strategic planning questions outlined by Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence in *Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities: Planning to Survive and Prosper* (1997). They are: (1) Who will our students be? (2) What should students learn? (3) What opportunities maximize student learning during the college experience? (4) What resources will we need? (5) How will we provide the needed resources? (6) What do our constituents expect of Bemidji State University? (7) How will we know when our purposes are being accomplished? (8) How will we tell our story? (9) How will we collaborate with our partners?

Another outcome of the planning meetings was the identification of both shared commitments and organizational principles. Many of these foundational statements resemble those described in the writings of Peter Senge, most notably in *The Fifth Discipline* (1994). Included in the shared commitments were comments such as (1) a faculty, staff, and administration devoted to student achievement and success; (2) a learning community empowered by the applications of technology to facilitate the learning process; (3) a university enriched by native heritages and world cultures; and (4) an involvement in innovative partnerships with education, business, and industry for advancing the educational, cultural, social, and economic interests of Minnesota, most particularly the northern tier of the state. All of the commitments identified by the participants are affirmed in the university's vision statement and mission statement.

In addition to the identification of shared commitments, six organizational principles were identified. Among these were (1) a recognition that broad-based participation in developing planning approaches and strategies through shared personal experiences, knowledge, and imagination is important; (2) an interest in having increasing opportunities to interact in an empowering environment that encourages and enables experimentation with new and different ideas; and (3) a genuine interest in valuing colleagues, regardless of assignment, for their contributions to learners and the university community.

Both the shared commitments and the shared organizational principles have been used as the foundation for the development of a climate conducive to implementation and maintenance of the Experimental Planning Initiative.

Empowerment

Peter Senge and his learning organization colleagues suggest that "meaningful change in institutional culture means redesigning not just the formal structures of the organization, but the hard-to-see patterns of interaction between people and processes" (Senge, 1994). A sense of genuine empowerment is more likely to occur when lines of communication are open and institutional hierarchy is not reinforced by procedural requirements that may be unnecessary or overly complex. This approach to empowerment turns traditional models of hierarchical organizational structures upside down. Such a shift in attitude and institutional responsiveness places students at the top of the hierarchy.

The empowerment theme is central to the Experimental Planning Initiative. It was particularly important in reconstituting the planning structures. A sense of "real empowerment" was fostered when the planning committees received more autonomy and authority in the planning process. This does not imply that committees have ultimate authority, but that, except in unusual circumstances, they can reasonably expect their recommendations to be supported; if their recommendations are not accepted, they will receive a prompt and thorough response and explanation. We learned early in the community-wide dialogues that a universal desire exists to become increasingly knowledgeable about the "thinking of the university." This position has been validated throughout the planning implementation process.

Planning Assumptions

The university is moving rapidly toward the adoption of a strategic thinking approach to planning. An approach based on clearly communicated institutional purposes is grounded in an understanding of the interrelationship between the institution, its constituencies, and the environment. The Experimental Planning Initiative is grounded in a number of working assumptions derived from an analysis of strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats in both the external and internal environments. The characteristics identified by the community-wide dialogues are very closely aligned with Pew Funded Projects focusing on institutional change and transformation. These challenges include (1) the pressure to contain cost and keep higher education affordable; (2) public demands for educational and financial accountability; (3) increased demands for educational quality and excellence; (4) growth of alternative models of postsecondary educational delivery, including distance education, corporate universities, and transnational delivery; (5) the explosion of knowledge produced both inside and outside the academy; (6) the need to serve an increasingly diverse society; (7) the pervasive impacts of technology on all areas of higher education. Additional external challenges encompass membership in a new higher education system (i.e., Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU), legislative priorities, demographics, and private sector and public sector needs).

The internal SWOT identified seven planning assumptions to be considered in the development of the Experimental Planning Initiative. Included among these assumptions were (1) placing learning as the university's first priority; (2) institutional planning fully consistent with all collective bargaining agreements; (3) planning that embraces ongoing self-assessment procedures and feedback mechanism; (4) planning guided by shared commitments and shared principles; (5) continuing fiscal constraints affecting the university's ability to offer educational services; (6) societal expectations requiring flexibility in meeting the needs of the learner, business, and industry; (7) in addition to the university's primary purpose of providing learner access to high quality educational opportunities on campus, the recognition that partnerships will increasingly create new and expanded learning opportunities.

The seven planning assumptions derived from the SWOT analysis continue to guide the evolution of the Experimental Planning Initiative. SWOT analyses are performed at several points each year for purposes of accommodating change to better alignment of the institution with the internal and external environments. However, unlike previous planning approaches, the focus is now on understanding the implications of a rapidly changing context from the perspective of accomplishing the university's longer-range purposes.

Three Recommendations for Planning

Three principle planning recommendations were identified as critical to the university if it was to better realize its potential and purposes. Although the principles are simply stated, the realization and maintenance of an empowering environment is an ongoing challenge. The three principal planning needs are as follows:

1. The university needs to clarify and reaffirm the primacy of its academic mission, setting clear institutional priorities and demonstrating that those priorities govern its decisions as commitments above all to students and learning.
2. The university needs to simplify procedures and institutional processes at every level, while preserving and enhancing meaningful communications, consultation, and capacity for timely decision making.
3. The university needs a leaner committee structure that incorporates a major planning committee responsible for coordinating planning efforts and recommending appropriate actions.

To provide a structure for realizing these recommendations, three major university-wide councils, including a University Council intended to serve as the primary body for institutional planning, have been created. The University Council consists of the co-chairs of the six university-wide planning committees. The Council is co-chaired by the Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and the Vice President for Administrative Affairs. The co-chairs share responsibility for communicating with the bargaining units. While the University Council has many functions and responsibilities, its primary function is institutional planning. The university-wide planning committees (i.e., academic affairs; budget and resource allocation; computing, technology, and learning resources; outreach and partnerships; recruitment and retention; and student and university services) are responsible for developing planning initiatives following consultation with the campus community for consideration by the University Council to accomplish the university's purposes. The six university-wide planning committees have replaced nearly twenty university committees. In addition to the University Council, an Innovations Council and Executive Council have also been created. The President chairs the Innovations Council. Its membership is drawn principally from representatives of business, all levels of education, civic and political leaders and special constituencies. The purpose of the Innovations Council is to advise the President on leading-edge developments to keep the university positioned as an educational innovator and focus of creativity and excitement. As such, it is intended to be a continuing source of new ideas with an emphasis on refining the university's vision.

The third council, the Executive Council, is composed of the President, the Vice Presidents, and the Deans. The Executive Council advises the President on matters pertaining to university policy, including consideration of planning initiatives proposed by the university-wide planning committees and the University Council. The Executive Council composition represents a strengthening of the university's commitment to the principle of academics through the inclusion of the deans.

The three Councils represent a structure that facilitates relationships and communications between planning, innovations, and policy implementation. The organizational structure also provides mechanisms and communication channels across the Councils and throughout the university community while respecting collective bargaining agreements.

Planning Outcomes

The Experimental Planning Initiative is in its third year. The new planning committees are fully implemented. Planning initiatives are moving forward from the planning committees to the University Council. Each planning initiative is linked to the university's mission. The University Council continues to provide planning recommendations to the Executive Council. The Executive Council has acted on all recommendations and communicated to planning committees, the University Council, and campus community the results of its decision-making process. Planning initiatives that have been enacted include the preparation of a university strategic plan, a comprehensive upgrade of the campus computer network, and the expansion of five-year program reviews that include a formal assessment component for all student and administrative service areas.

As the institution moves forward with its strategic planning, it is guided by the thoughts of Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence who stated in *Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities* that:

> For a strategic plan to be effective and adequately affect policy, it must state the obvious directly, address the resulting issues simply and understandably, and identify the niche of opportunities within the grasp of the institution, given its role and capacity. To reinstate the obvious planning principle, the strategic plan must gradually become an instrument that, in spite of its inelegance, unites rather than divides the campus. (1997, p. 302)

Summary

The Experimental Planning Initiative is increasingly a success story. Beginning with the initial series of community dialogues, it was evident the institution was prepared to embrace change under the appropriate circumstances. The process to proposing the Experimental Planning Initiative has been somewhat lengthy and arduous. The comprehensive self-study site visit was very important in creating an institutional will to undertake yet another attempt to create a meaningful approach to planning that would be embraced by the campus community. Leadership provided by several key senior faculty members and encouragement by external consultants and the chair of the North Central Association visitation team were critical to the validation of discussion points and proposals. Questions raised during the self-study visit were helpful in clarifying continuing challenges and in encouraging the institution to move forward. The test of time will ultimately validate both what has been proposed and what has been accomplished. The plan and its intended outcomes are not without its skeptics. Yet, there is a climate of increasing optimism that the strategic planning process and the strategic plan itself provide the necessary opportunities to continue the university's rich tradition of providing education that enriches and transforms the lives of its learners.

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The Learning Organization as a Model for Successful Self-Studies

David Porter
Thomas A. Angelo

Our title begs at least three key questions. What is a successful self-study? What is a learning organization? How can they be linked productively? Though we'll focus most of our attention on the last two questions, it's important to define success first.

Defining a Successful Self-Study

We consider gaining reaccreditation a necessary but not sufficient goal for the self-study process. An institution that treats self-study and related assessment activities as simply pro forma compliance exercises is missing opportunities for sustained, meaningful organizational learning and potential renewal. From our point of view, a successful self-study both creates and capitalizes on such opportunities. And we're not alone in this. The regional and professional accrediting agencies, including NCA, all urge institutions to make their self-studies internally meaningful.

For us, then, successful self-studies are authentic and potentially transformative. They differ from traditional, pro forma self-studies that seek to create only the illusion of perfection. Authentic self-studies are aimed at comprehensive and continuing institutional improvement; they may require changes of consciousness, even shifts in paradigm. In contrast, traditional approaches are often driven by the desire to meet particular, predetermined, external criteria, to "answer the mail" or "check off the boxes," and, in so doing, earn another 10 years of accreditation. Such inauthentic approaches are likely to frustrate and alienate important constituencies within the institution and obscure rather than reveal opportunities to improve faculty and student learning. An authentic self-study asks questions that are consequential, that will make a difference to the process of teaching and learning. It requires a willingness to recognize extant problems and discontinuities and a commitment to address them. While not every institution will choose to engage in such authentic, transformative self-studies, those that do can reap substantial and enduring benefits.

Enhancing educational effectiveness and quality through the self-study requires developing shared goals and increased trust. In other words, it requires a change in the culture. Learning organizations offer higher education a framework for self-studies that can help colleges and universities achieve such change. To begin with, conducting an authentic self-study requires the institution to select and focus on goals worthy of the time and effort required to prepare any study. The self-study goals must be widely shared and valued. Making the president, provost, or board look good is a goal unlikely to motivate many faculty and staff, for example. The next step is to actively involve the entire campus in developing a shared vision—among individuals representing all constituencies—of what the institution is striving to become. Not everyone has to participate for the self-study to be an authentic success, but everyone must be invited.

Another key component of a successful self-study is the development of a truly effective assessment process. Unlike its cosmetic imitations, authentic assessment, like science itself, is anchored in the principle of falsifiability. This suggests that assessment will be so bold as to seek evidence contrary to the institution's own assumptions and aspirations. Every academic policy, every administrative practice, every curriculum and pedagogical approach can be considered as hypotheses, propositions begging to be tested against the patterns of performance they produce.

Developing a Learning Organization

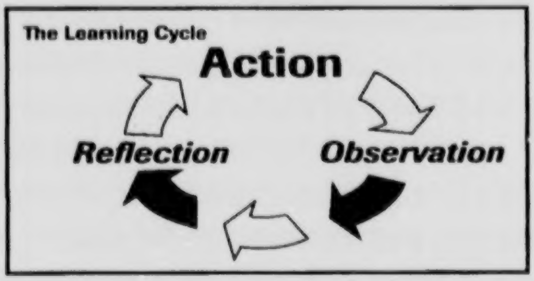
Learning organizations are groups in which individuals work together to create systems that adapt and thrive and in which individuals have increasing opportunities to take greater pride in what they produce. The late W. Edwards

Deming, founder of the integrated set of principles known as "total quality," provided a cogent approach to effecting such transformational changes (Deming, 1986). Deming was an educator. He believed that "profound knowledge," which included an awareness of statistics, psychology, systems, and the nature of knowledge itself, was essential to authentic quality improvement. Until his dying day, Deming waged war against quality pretenders, those who emphasized techniques and appearance over substantial improvements to organizational systems. In the manufacturing and service industries, Deming believed that achieving true quality necessarily and directly involved taking seriously the perceptions and motivations of workers themselves. Ironically, many educational institutions appear to have been tempted to neglect the theoretical aspects of Deming's approach and to simply adopt some of the tools and techniques developed by his students and disciples. For these academic quality pretenders, self-study and assessment processes can become superficial activities designed to secure reaccreditation by creating an illusion of academic excellence.

Peter Senge's (1990) five disciplines of a learning organization (personal mastery, mental models, sharing vision, team learning and systems thinking) are a refinement of Deming's original concept of profound knowledge. Defining a discipline as a practice that builds capacity over time, Senge suggests that these five disciplines, taken together, can be necessary and sufficient to developing a learning organization. Each of these disciplines can help determine appropriate organizational policies and shape the processes of authentic institutional self-studies.

The first discipline is *personal mastery.* This discipline challenges each person in the organization to continually clarify and deepen her or his personal awareness, understanding, and ability. The process begins with identifying personal values and priorities, then making a sincere commitment to actively pursue these espoused goals. Personal mastery represents the grassroots of any learning organization; it challenges everyone to start "walking their talk." This discipline also reminds everyone that each individual in the organization has something to learn. Traditional distinctions between the learned administrators and faculty and the student learners not only create artificial boundaries and unnecessary alienation, they diminish the chances that anything truly useful will be learned from the self-study process.

The model below depicts the development of personal mastery. Referred to as the AOR model for its three component processes, it suggests that personal mastery involves and requires three successive activities: action, observation, and reflection (Hughes et al., 1999). Many individuals (as well as organizations) stagnate because they overemphasize a single component and neglect one or both of the others.



The discipline of personal mastery has many implications for conducting an authentic self-study. It seems odd that in an industry supposedly dedicated to human development, there is so little actual inquiry into the learning process. Might the AOR model apply to classroom teaching and learning? Regrettably, teaching is often done in isolation, seldom observed, critiqued, or appreciated by either administrators or colleagues. Academic freedom is often the rationalization for this extraordinary level of privacy, but the underlying issues are usually fear and lack of trust. Perhaps it is the nearly complete absence of observation that renders the woeful inadequacy of reflection moot. Authentic assessment of higher education must start where the action is: in the classroom where we assume teaching and learning occur. Basic questions such as Who is doing what? How are they doing it? How well is it working? How do we know? beg to be addressed. Much of the recent success of academic audits rests in their capacity to initiate such inquiry across the institution. The same questions should also be applied to the training and education of faculty, staff, and administrators.

One final but very significant implication of this discipline for self-study committees is to construct them so they will promote personal mastery among their members. Committees need opportunity, access, authority, and resources to address the institution's most important questions. To expect these committees to meet significant challenges but then fail to provide necessary support clearly conveys the administration's intent that assessment be more apparent than actual.

Mental models are the second discipline of learning organizations. These ubiquitous cognitive structures are constructed of our underlying assumptions and reflected by patterns in our behavior. Although individuals are often unaware of their own implicit "schemas," these mental models guide perception and thinking as well as behavior. This discipline invites individuals to discover and examine their own assumptions. It involves real conversations that blend advocacy and inquiry, with each individual asking questions in order to learn and better understand, and stating views so they become increasingly comprehensible to colleagues.

Douglas McGregor's (1966) classic distinction between Theory X and Theory Y reflects alternative mental models. Theory X adherents assume that learning is work, that it is distasteful, and that students and faculty must be coerced or cajoled into performing necessary educational tasks. This theory often leads to a lack of institutional innovation and the inevitable attribution that the institution simply does not have the right kind of students, faculty, or staff. In contrast, Theory Y begins with the assumption that everyone wants to learn because it is intrinsically motivating. This theory often leads to institutional innovation and high levels of enthusiastic participation and adaptation. Unfortunately, many administrators and faculty members assert their adherence to a progressive Theory Y, but their policies and programs make their commitment to Theory X clear. Such discontinuities obviate the development of institutional as well as individual integrity and inhibit the growth of trust (Argyris and Schon, 1978).

Mental models have important implications for the self-study process. Often instruments and assessment activities are selected without reference to any underlying theoretical model of education. Such atheoretical groping and hoping is likely to be both expensive and ultimately counterproductive. Deming referred to it as tampering (Aguayo, 1990). Every assessment should be supported by an explanation of what might be learned and how the results will be used. Seldom will a single instrument or assessment activity yield evidence that is so persuasive that it compels immediate action. However, without suitable theoretical models, results from different studies using different methods and instruments and diverse samples of subjects can never be synthesized. Authentic assessment is done for the purpose of testing hypotheses; pro forma assessment is done for the purpose of impressing others (either with results or sometimes with the mere investment in activity). The most obvious way to distinguish the two is to ask those conducting a study to share their mental model concerning what the instrument is measuring, what they hope to learn from the results, and how the results will be used to improve the educational process.

Sharing vision is the third discipline. Given a choice, most people aspire to important, even ambitious, goals (at least according to Theory Y). What galvanizes an organization in the pursuit of excellence is the process of having substantive conversations about the future each individual seeks to create. The practice of sharing vision involves revealing one's deepest desires and most significant aspirations; it fosters genuine commitment and mutual trust. Sharing a vision is hard work. To be effective, it must be practiced continuously rather than once every ten years. In its simplest form, it might involve asking each individual and each constituency what they have done that contributed the most to institutional goals in the recent past, what they hope to do in the near future, and what support they need from others to be successful. There is great value in having each individual talk about what he or she is looking for and what the environment would look like as the institution made progress toward achieving its purpose. Sharing the vision is the primary means for sharing the patience as well as the passion that characterize highly effective learning organizations. Sharing vision is also one of three components of Peter Senge's (1999) "Innovation Eco-system." Learning (and relearning) the institutional purpose provides the foundation for vision sharing. Assessing results is a direct consequence of vision sharing. The ongoing pursuit of these three activities is the cycle of innovation that provides institutions with increasing adaptive capacity.

Basically, sharing vision is what an authentic self-study does; it's implications for conducting self-studies are profound. Authentic self-studies are likely to follow Senge's cycle of innovation. Far too little attention is paid in most self-studies to discerning the institution's purpose. Some institutions have rambling mission statements that basically commit to being all things to all constituencies all the time. Others have statements so succinct but ambiguous that no one even attempts to explain or apply them. One of the first goals of self-assessment should be to help the institution reach a common understanding about its unique mission and priorities. Self-study committees provide an ideal venue for the conversations characteristic of authentic vision sharing. Both of these activities are necessary prerequisites to developing an effective assessment program. Once there is agreement concerning what needs to be measured, the next question the self-study will face is "How?" The prevailing wisdom suggests that the institution should start with a few priorities and then measure them in several different ways using several different methods. In other words, it's wise to use descriptive as well as evaluative measures (Palomba and Banta, 1999).

Team learning is the fourth discipline; it is about synergy (the amplification of individual effects through interaction). When teams learn, not only are they producing extraordinary results, their members are growing and learning too. Team learning begins with a dialogue; people suspend judgment and agree to think together. It involves eliminating factors that impede learning. Competition, parochialism, and traditional academic rhetorical obfuscation all must be set aside in the interest of developing trust and common commitments. As Deming once suggested, such work "is not instant pudding" (Aguayo, 1990).

Tuckman's (1965) classic model sets out four distinct stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. During the first stage, the team is formed; individuals are brought together and given a charter. If the team members are willing to extend themselves beyond perfunctory academic chitchat, they are likely to learn that their views and values vary. This is the beginning of the storming stage. It does not necessarily have to be acrimonious, but it is essential for the unique perspective of each member of the team to be recognized and the dimensions of difference between team members to be understood. Only after issues at this stage have been candidly explored can the team establish common values and aspirations. The high levels of common understanding and mutual trust that emerge as the norming stage concludes mark the beginning of the performing stage.

Team learning is vital. Teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning units in organizations; teams have the potential for much greater and more rapid learning than do even the brightest and most adroit individuals. Unfortunately academic teams (committees) are often the very antithesis of effectiveness. There is little difficulty in forming committees; they diffuse responsibility well and provide a convenient forum for interminable rhetorical obstruction. Commonly accepted faculty norms concerning committee work, once internalized in individual mental models, preclude authentic commitment, meaningful preparation, or necessary candor. As a result, most academic committees do not develop beyond the forming stage; they stagnate.

Another mistake often occurs when well-intentioned administrators or faculty leaders try to short circuit the development cycle by skipping the storming stage and proceeding directly to the norming stage. Attempting to imprint a leader's vision on committee members before they have had a chance to express their individual values virtually ensures that the committee will remain relatively immature, impotent, and ineffective. Such committees will find ways to generate the required "evidence" and a plausible narrative to support the leader's particular perspective, but after all is said and done and the accreditation committee has left, nothing will have changed in the eyes or educational experience of the average student or faculty member.

Systems thinking is the fifth discipline. All organizations are systems; each person and event within a system affects all other people and events in the same system. These patterns of influence are difficult to observe; most people focus on isolated parts and not on the system as a whole. Systems thinking encourages each person to pause and consider the potential causal connections that may be revealed by broader perspectives; it helps individuals and groups see how to effect desirable changes and collectively attain the outcomes they most desire.

Success requires that both trust and understanding increase simultaneously. Understanding increases as established models are subjected to systematic inquiry. As an example, consider the popularity and assumed potency of collaborative learning. We in higher education believe that so powerful a pedagogy comes with a virtual guarantee of success. (There is a robust literature supporting the notion that team learning can lead to the attainment of a broad range of desirable outcomes.) Several years ago, while conducting a comprehensive assessment of the relative contributions of each of 35 general education courses to students' knowledge, critical thinking, and intellectual curiosity at the Air Force Academy, we put this hypothesis to the test (Porter, 1998). To our surprise, the proportion of the course grade determined by group work was the only significant course characteristic related to any of our educational criteria. However, to our surprise (and dismay) the correlation was negative. In fact, among the nine courses in one particular academic division, the correlation was -.80. Collaboration can be a boon to teaching and learning; however when it is imposed on faculty and employed inappropriately, it can interact with other aspects of the system to produce unintended consequences or contrary results. There is simply no pedagogy so powerful that it can be applied without an understanding of the existing system.

However, increased understanding of the process of teaching and learning cannot be achieved without also increasing trust, and the example cited above initially raised significant issues concerning trust and collegiality and the advisability of doing any further assessment. However, recognizing where the problem was localized (and how it came about), then marshalling the support necessary to fix the system, ultimately enhanced overall trust among faculty and administrators. Institutional leaders must realize that being trustworthy is a prerequisite to the development of trust among faculty. Basically this requires an institution to consider the alignment between its practices, policies, and espoused priorities. Misalignment among these components is likely to be most obvious to those farthest from the seat of power; this is why comprehensive, campus-wide surveys can be so valuable to those truly seeking to enhance institutional integrity.

Simply being trustworthy is not sufficient to engender trust, however; the institution must also actively and repeatedly convey its trust of faculty and students. To do so requires it to seek out, then carefully consider, constituent perceptions of inconsistencies between its rhetoric and its practices. It must create a culture in which evidence is valued more highly than hierarchical authority. The challenge of leadership is to synchronize these activities and continually include more individuals and more constituencies in the institution's most significant conversations.

In Summary: Five Modest Steps Toward More Successful Self-Studies

Even the longest journeys begin with a single step, the proverb reminds us, so let us offer five beginning steps, related to Senge's five disciplines that we believe will lead an institution toward authentic and successful self-studies. As a first step toward personal mastery, we must resist the natural urge to hurry the change process. It rarely works. We'll save time and grief later if we plan for and take the time necessary to build trust, shared language, and a common commitment to our most important shared goals. This means, of course, starting the process well in advance of the reaccreditation visit. Second, to explore mental models, in addition to building trust, we can begin by sharing examples and evidence of our most successful programs and practices. Building on that second step, it will be easier to develop a shared vision of what is possible and to commit to its realization. Fourth, from the beginning, we can promote authentic team learning. This may require an expert facilitator to train us to work effectively together; it will inevitably require us each to develop thicker skins and more generous spirits. And fifth, we can apply systems thinking to our planning by asking how well our vision fits within existing institutional structures and agendas, and what that suggests for change.

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Caveat: Views expressed in this paper are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent the policy of their institutions, or any broader organizations to which they belong.

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What Is a Mission Statement?

Kristin M. Bowden

Historically, whenever a person or group of people wanted to achieve something meaningful, they made a pronouncement of mission or purpose. One only has to look in the pages of the Bible, in great literature, in history, or even in society's cultural avenues to find such pronouncements. For example, every episode of *Star Trek* began with these words of purpose: "Space, the final frontier. ... These are the voyages of the Starship *Enterprise*. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before" (Abrahams, 1995).

Mission statements are considered the starting points for most management programs, including TQM, self-directed work teams, management by objective, and divisional planning (Bart, 1997). The most important role of the mission statement, however, is to function as the foundation for planning (Pearce, 1994). As a planning tool, it should serve to answer a variety of questions about the company (Pearce, 1994):

- What is the organization's self-concept?
- What is the principal product?
- What is the service area of the company?
- Who are the primary customers?
- Why do we exist?
- What needs do we fulfill?

The mission should serve management planning in a variety of ways. First, the mission should mirror top management's view of the strategic position of the company. It should also help cement established goals for the organization. Next, a mission statement should send a message to customers that the company has sound strategies. Fourth, it should inspire confidence in the organization. Finally, the mission should not only serve current planning needs, but also lay the groundwork for longer-range planning (Channon, 1997). James R. Lucas, president of Luman Consultants, feels that every company needs a clear mission or vision "to guide us, to remind us, to inspire us, to control us, and to free us" (1998, p. 23).

Writing the Mission Statement

The discussion to this point has assumed one basic fact: that the statements are well-written. While there is no one set way to go about writing a mission statement, several researchers agree on some basic elements that should be present.

Professor John Pearce, endowed chair in strategic management at George Mason University, identifies several fundamental beliefs that should serve as prerequisites before an organization begins the process (1994, p. xi):

- Belief that the organization's product and service can provide benefits commensurate with its cost or price
- Belief that the product or service can satisfy a customer need not currently met adequately for specific market segments
- Belief that the technology to be used in the production process will provide a product or service that is cost and quality competitive
- Belief that with hard work and with the support of others, the organization can do better than just survive; it can grow and meet financial objectives

- Belief that the manager's and leader's philosophy will result in a favorable public image and will provide financial and psychological rewards for those willing to invest their labor and money
- Belief that the self-concept that the managers and leaders have of the organization can be communicated to and adopted by employees, investors, and other stakeholders
- Belief that the organization can provide a quality product or service that satisfies a customer need.

If an organization can buy in to these belief statements or a similar set of its own making, it is ready to begin the arduous task of developing a mission statement.

Many researchers agree that four basic elements or parameters comprise a mission statement: audience, length, tone, and format or approach (Abrahams, 1995; Drohan, 1999). Who is the statement written for–employees, customers, stockholders, etc., or any combination? Knowing the target audience will aid in answering other important questions. How long should the statement be? Some companies have long statements, and others have single-sentence statements. The fundamental guideline, however, is for the mission to "be long enough to reach the target audience" (Abrahams, 1995, p. 47).

Tone will be different for each organization. Again, make sure that it is written in the language of the target audience. "Lofty or ponderous" statements should be avoided (Drohan, 1999). Jeffery Abrahams asserts that certain keywords will also help set the tone. In his survey of more than 300 mission statements, he found that many words were used numerous times and helped the audience understand the tone of the statement. The top ten words used are listed, followed by the number of times they were cited: service (230), mission (221), customers (211), value (183), employees (157), growth (118), environment (117), shareholders (114), success (105), and leader (104) (1995, pp. 49–50).

An organization must carefully choose the words to be included in its mission. For example, if a word such as *profit* is used consistently, the statement will take on a different meaning than if the word *customer* is used.

The fourth element in the mission is the format or approach of the statement. In other words, how is it presented to the audience? The approach should be determined by the culture of the company. Some companies formally print the statement on card stock and display it; other organizations laminate a small card that can be carried in a wallet; and some print the statement on the back of business cards. Regardless of the method, the most important aspect is to get the statement to the audience (Abrahams, 1995).

After the parameters of audience, length, tone, and format have been set, the next step is to decide who is going to write the mission statement. Top management must give full support to the process. Support can mean either specific language to be included or general ideas to be represented. Either way, management must be involved in every step of the process (Pearce, 1994). Creation of a committee to review or write the mission statement would seem to be the most logical step. Inclusion on the committee must not be limited to management or even to employees. "Involvement of middle managers, shareholders, and customers...was found to have a more positive impact on ... outcomes. ... The mission development process should not be an autocratic or top-down exercise" (Bart, 1999, p. 37). In other words, give the people who will be living the mission a hand in writing the mission.

Once the decision is made about who will be involved in writing the mission statement, the organization can begin the writing process. John Pearce outlines five steps he sees as important in writing the mission statement (1994). First, the organization should gather as much information about the company and its goals as possible. Second, those involved should produce a rough outline of the proposed statement. The writers should then get as much feedback as possible from all levels of the organization. At this point, the mission statement should be revised. The final step outlined by Pearce is to get management approval of the final product.

While these steps may seem simplistic, they provide a framework by which to accomplish the set goal. When gathering information about the organization, it is very important to consider what details in a mission statement can be associated with high performance. According to Christopher K. Bart, these items include (1998, p. 56):

- A statement of purpose or general, nonfinancial goals
- A statement of values
- Specification of behavioral standards
- Identification of the organization's competitive strategy
- A statement of vision–big, bold, and long-term
- An expression of intent to satisfy the needs and expectations of the stakeholders.

Other researchers also believe that it is imperative for the mission statements to include a clear picture of the organization and its product (Newsome & Hayes, 1990). In a study of 90 public higher education institutions, however, researchers found that a small percentage of postsecondary institutions included all of the necessary dimensions: only 30 percent contained target audience, 35 percent contained a self-definition, and most troublesome, only 33 percent defined their product (Newsome & Hayes, 1990).

After the mission is complete, many organizations feel that the work is complete as well. In reality, the most difficult task is just beginning. The statements must now come to life. "Deeds must back up the rhetoric" (Pearce, 1994, p. 7). Dissemination is very important, along with review processes, in aiding the employees' understanding of the vitality of the mission. In fact, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, an accrediting agency that outlines the importance of mission to higher education institutions, essentially begins with an appropriate mission and then looks for patterns of evidence that the mission is in use. Such patterns include (NCA, 1995):

- Long- and short-range goals are in place
- Constituencies are involved in evaluation of mission and purposes
- Decision-making processes are appropriate to the mission
- Constituencies understand the mission and purposes
- The public is kept informed about purposes.

Perhaps the most important question can now be asked: Is the mission statement making a difference to the organization?

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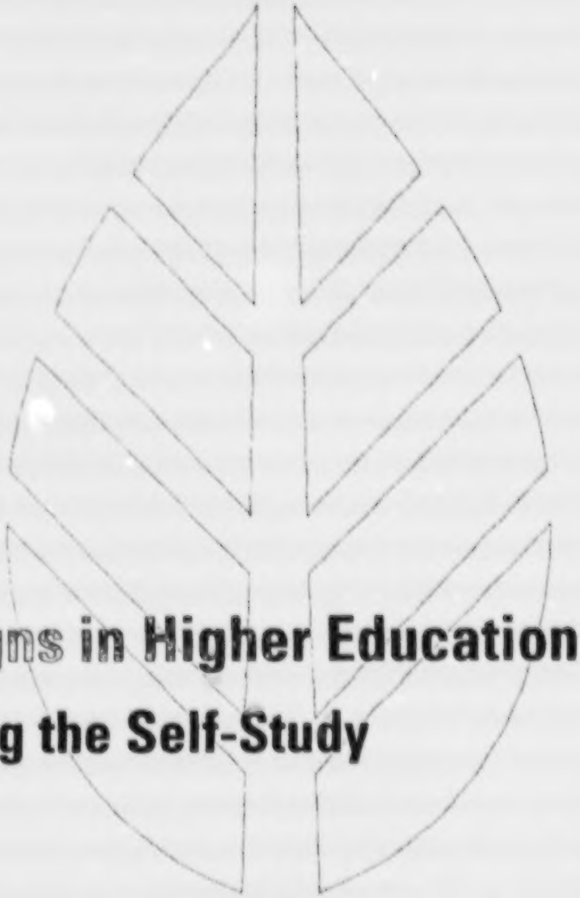

Chapter 14

New Designs in Higher Education

Coordinating the Self-Study

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

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Organizing the Self-Study for Yourself, the Steering Committee, and the Campus Community

Clark Jenkins

Conducting an institutional self-study and preparing the self-study document require a tremendous amount of time and effort. As Self-Study Coordinator, you may feel like you have all of the responsibility and none of the authority to get the job done. To a large extent, this is true. The only way to persuade colleagues to help with what many will view as **your** task is to convince them that (1) it is in their best interest to help, (2) you know what you are doing, and (3) you are well organized, so you will not be wasting their time. Efficient organization is the only way you're going to pull off the first two items, and as for the third—well, you've got too much to do to waste any of your own time, either.

The following statements highlight some of the key aspects of organizational strategy that worked for us at North Arkansas College. In order to provide clear guidelines to everyone involved, the Steering Committee published campus-wide a Guide for Conducting the Self-Study prior to organizing the subcommittees. The Guide contained detailed instructions regarding responsibilities of participants, what should and should not be done when collecting and analyzing data, and a style guide for writing the self-study document. It also included copies of the Criteria for Accreditation and GIRs.

Start Early

At North Arkansas College, the self-study co-coordinators were appointed, one from each of our two campuses, during the Fall, 1997 semester for a comprehensive evaluation visit scheduled for the 2000-2001 academic year. This was **not** too much time!

If possible, consider sharing your responsibility with a co-coordinator—I can't imagine trying to do this alone—and decide on a division of labor. My co-coordinator and I decided very early that he would be responsible for the resource room and would handle all requests for information. I was responsible for basic organization and for keeping everyone on schedule. He was the main editor of the self-study document, while I wrote the introductory and concluding chapters. Make sure you get release time. I was given release from one class per semester for the duration of the self-study process. My co-coordinator, a librarian, was given the equivalent release from his duties.

Do Your Homework *Before* You Select a Steering Committee

Study the NCA *Handbook of Accreditation* like it is your only text from which to prepare for a comprehensive exam. Notice that there are five Criteria for Accreditation and 24 General Institutional Requirements (GIRs) that your institution **must** meet to be granted continued accreditation. The *Handbook* also cross-references the Criteria for Accreditation and the GIRs. Rough out a tentative outline of how you might arrange these as topics in the self-study document. Think of the individuals on your campus with a reputation for getting things done, and think of how their interests might match the rough outline you have prepared. Talk to these people. Share your outline with them, ask for their feedback, and modify the outline in response to their suggestions. Ask if they are willing to serve in some sort of leadership capacity. You are **not** promising Steering Committee appointments at this time. What you **are** doing is interviewing candidates for your top management team (Steering Committee) and using their feedback to polish your outline.

Keep the Steering Committee as small as possible, and don't be afraid to delegate authority. One of the mistakes that was made while preparing for our 1990 comprehensive visit was having a Steering Committee that was too large. By the time everyone got there, settled down, etc., it took forever to conduct business (I was one of the members). This time, we had two coordinators and one Steering Committee member for each of the five Criteria for Accreditation. Each Steering Committee member oversaw from one to four subcommittees. Each subcommittee was responsible for writing one chapter of the self-study.

Attend the NCA Annual Meetings

Try to get a budget that allows as many people on your Steering Committee as possible to come to the NCA Annual Meeting every year during the self-study process. Attending the Annual Meetings is the single best tool available for getting the Steering Committee focused on its job and for getting a firm outline of the self-study in place.

Be Realistic

At the outset, the Steering Committee had all sorts of ideas about how to build interest in the self-study, how to keep the campus community informed, and how to persuade people to stay on schedule. We were going to have our own page on the college web site (updated weekly), contests (complete with prizes, of course, for those who finished first), and so on. None of this happened. Why? Because it all took time, and none of us had time for something that didn't really have to be done. Memos (both email and snail mail) were faster, and we didn't need the contests. Stick to the basics.

Establish a Timeline

The *Handbook of Accreditation* has a suggested timeline that is an excellent starting point for organizing your time. Remember to submit your institution's timeline to your NCA staff member for feedback. This paper does not have room for a detailed timeline, but in general terms, here's how it went for us:

Fall 1997:	Coordinators get organized.
Spring 1998:	Steering Committee is selected and gets organized.
Fall 1998:	Subcommittees are selected and organized; resource room is started, and institution-wide search is initiated for copies of all reports, statistics, etc., that might be useful in the self-study; all materials are cataloged and indexed as they come into the resource room.
Spring 1999:	Subcommittees compare their data needs with what is already available; a master list of "unknown data" is compiled so that one campus-wide survey can be conducted to collect all missing information; preliminary outlines of each chapter are presented to the Steering Committee.
Fall 1999:	Campus-wide self-study survey is administered, and first drafts of all self-study chapters are completed.
Spring 2000:	First draft report is circulated campus-wide to check for completeness and correctness; second draft is circulated to ensure that all needed corrections were made.
Summer 2000:	Final draft is printed; Basic Institutional Data Forms are completed; Third Party Comment is sought; all necessary materials are sent to NCA and evaluation team members.
September 18–20, 2000:	Successful Comprehensive Evaluation Visit!

Use Only Volunteer Labor

You are the only one who will get any release time for working on the self-study (and whatever you get won't be enough). For everyone else, this is going to be one more committee assignment on top of an already bulging workload. During the Fall 1998 pre-semester workshops, our NCA staff member was on hand to help us make our case to the faculty and staff. We asked for volunteers to indicate their first, second, and third choices for areas in which to serve.

More than half of the college's full-time employees (96 out of 167 faculty and staff) volunteered. The Steering Committee compared their individual strengths and weaknesses, who they did and did not get along with, and whether both campuses and all areas on each campus were getting uniform representation on each subcommittee, and we actually managed to place everyone in one of their chosen areas. It was important to make sure that each subcommittee had at least one good organizer, one good analyzer, one good leader, and one good writer. As we saw where mistakes had been made, we quietly shuffled a few individuals from one subcommittee to another and allowed a few people to drop out. Even with strong, open support from the president and the rest of the administration, remember that everything you get you have to ask for; you are not in a position to tell anyone to do anything. It is occasionally necessary to remind subcommittee members of this, as well as yourself and the rest of the Steering Committee.

Don't Have Unnecessary Meetings

Don't insist on regular meetings whether there is a reason to meet or not. Our Steering Committee met weekly during the planning stages, almost not at all during the data collecting and writing phase, and at several all-day sessions putting together the first and second drafts. Between meetings, business was handled informally via email, telephone, and personal contact. The subcommittees conducted business the same way. We insisted that everyone—including ourselves—keep and turn in some sort of log of all actions taken outside of formal meetings (as well as minutes of all meetings).

Create Clear Job Descriptions

Our Guide for Conducting the Self-Study listed the responsibilities of all participants, including Self-Study Coordinators, steering committee members, subcommittee chairs, and individual committee members. It outlined the responsibilities and structure of each subcommittee and included the topics that each subcommittee was expected to address. We made it clear from the start that such detailed instructions were not intended to be dictatorial, but rather to be thorough. By listing detailed descriptions of everyone's job in a publication given to everyone, it was hoped that any detail we had overlooked would be brought to our attention (it was, fortunately, on several occasions).

Provide a Style Guide

It was our intention from the start that each subcommittee would present to us a completed chapter as close as possible in appearance to the way it would look in the final self-study document. We were determined that, except for the introductory and concluding chapters, we would be editors, not writers. This required a detailed set of instructions dealing with everything from use of third person and other grammatical considerations, to how to handle our decision to not use appendices or footnotes, to keeping in mind the multiple audiences for whom the report was being written. It also included instructions on fonts, spacing, how to present charts and graphs, what word processing program to use, and how to submit documents. As a result, minimal editing was required to get the self-study to read as one complete document rather than a collection of disjointed reports.

Say "Thank You" and "Congratulations"

After the evaluation team has left, after their final report has arrived and been disseminated institution-wide, you need something to say "thank you" to every member of the college community who helped with the self-study. You also deserve congratulations for a job well-done. We took care of both by planning a party. Actually, we asked our President to plan a party. He did. It was wonderful. We **all** deserved it!

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Suggestions on How to Make Your Mission Impossible Turn into Mission Accomplished!

Kathy Burlingame

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to help your college effectively complete a self-study process, produce a Self-Study Report, and conduct a successful on-site visit.

For most of you reading this article, the responsibility to coordinate a self-study process has already been delegated and accepted. As a new Self-Study Coordinator, you may be experiencing emotions on a continuum ranging from excitement and anticipation due to new challenges all the way to some anxiety or concern (OK, fear) as you have been chosen to leap out of a moving institutional life into a new and unknown educational frontier. If John Wayne were to show up with Tom Cruise in your institution's next *Mission Impossible* film, John's character might encourage Tom's character by saying, "Cheer up, Pilgrim, this is a doable task, and we can accomplish this together!" Enclosed are some ideas to help you get started.

Research

◇ Read the NCA *Handbook* from cover to cover! I highlighted, wrote questions, and made notations all over mine. I found it to be a very helpful resource.

◇ Review previous documents from your institution's last on-site visit, starting with the most recent Team Report, including the institutional strengths and recommendations.

◇ Gather and scan documents from other institutions that have recently gone through the accreditation process. Include a search on the Internet for specific topics such as assessment, mission, and institutional integrity. Initially, I started with a broad search of the topics and did not limit the search by institutional levels. I am glad that I did not focus only on combined community and technical colleges, as I would have missed some of the rich resources and ideas presented by larger four-year colleges, private schools, and stand-alone community or technical colleges. Scan NCA's web site to familiarize yourself with their resources. Review previous articles published in recent editions of NCA's *A Collection of Papers on Self-Study and Institutional Improvement*.

◇ Find out what institutions in your area are working on the self-study process. (Your NCA staff liaison may be an excellent source for this information.) Look for one or two institutions whose on-site visit is at least 4-6 months ahead of your scheduled visit. Ask to observe one of their Steering Committee meetings or planning sessions. Thankfully, several northern Minnesota colleges were scheduled for accreditation visits a few months prior to Northland's on-site date, and they allowed me to share in some of their meetings. Their Self-Study Coordinators and campus Assessment Chairpersons met to discuss NCA's General Institutional Requirements, models of approach for the self-study process, assessment, and other issues. Also, this group hosted a meeting with their NCA staff liaison to address specific questions. Having a group meeting was an effective use of the liaison's time, and it helped to hear other people's questions! Finally, ask to visit at least one institution's Resource Room prior to their on-site visit.

Mentoring and Support

◇ Initiate communication with your institution's NCA liaison. Connecting with a real person who can help you recharge your emotional batteries, rekindle the vision, and give you direction if you get overwhelmed is essential.

◇ Seek out a mentor or a knowledgeable, objective person external to your institution to act as a sounding board. Look for someone who can encourage you in the self-study process and is willing to share his or her wisdom, ideas, and sample documents. An external perspective is healthy in that it encourages you to think out of the box of your institutional culture. Also, an external mentor provides you with an objective resource who may energize the self-study process by asking tough questions that may need to be considered while completing the self-study process.

◇ My mentor was very helpful in getting me started with the self-study process. She showed me how she was organizing the data as they were coming in and shared with me her approach to writing the report. For example, some of the historical information of what the college has done since its last on-site visit can be written earlier in the self-study process. Also, she encouraged me to document the General Institutional Requirements early in the process, as these are foundational to the Self-Study Report. Finally, my mentor was a contact who eventually opened the doors for me to attend some of the regional meetings for Self-Study Coordinators and Assessment Chairpersons.

Steering Committee

The establishment of a strong Steering Committee is essential to the self-study process. It is helpful to identify specific expectations and qualifications for membership in the Steering Committee prior to choosing or soliciting volunteers. Keep in mind that is important to have broad representation from all constituent groups in the self-study process and in the Steering Committee membership. Northland Community and Technical College chose to follow the fairly common approach of having each of the Steering Committee members serve as a co-chair of one of the subcommittees. A brief list of some of the qualifications for Steering Committee membership is included to stimulate discussion on your campus. Steering Committee members should:

○ be objective–be able to view a situation from more than one perspective;

○ have a history of effective problem solving and critical thinking skills;

○ possess leadership skills and be a team player;

○ have a can-do attitude and do the work that is expected;

○ demonstrate effective communication skills, be a good listener, and be respected by peers; and

○ be employees whose scope of influence includes the expertise necessary to achieve the institution's goals.

During the time of Northland's self-study process, the college experienced a change in administration in the position of the Dean of Academic Affairs, and two co-chairpersons retired. Both subcommittees completed their assigned tasks under the leadership of the remaining co-chairpersons, who had a can-do attitude!

Model or Institutional Approach to the Self-Study Process

Identify the type of approach or model that fits well with your institution. Four different models are presented here as examples to start your creative juices flowing. The best approach is the one that fits your institutional culture and is consistent with your institutional goals relative to the self-study process.

◇ Some institutions approach the self-study process purely from the *perspective of the five criteria*. Subcommittees are created and charged with fully documenting an institutional response to each of the examples of patterns of evidence listed under each criterion.

◇ A *functional approach* toward the self-study process requires a little more vision and planning at the start of the self-study process but may yield a rich and holistic perspective of the institution. For example, each functional area of the institution is charged with documenting patterns of evidence relative to their service or functional area (e.g., assessment, student services, academic or instructional, facilities and physical plant, and so on).

- Another interesting model is to view the institution from a *continuous quality approach* and identify priority areas of concern or focus. One institution used this model and identified two major themes as the foundation for its self-study process (improving student services and communication). Each of the criteria was addressed with an emphasis on the patterns of evidence relative to these two areas.
- *Connecting the institution's strategic planning* efforts to the five criteria and the self-study process is another model that has been successfully utilized.

Northland Community and Technical College's Approach to the Self-Study Process

Northland Community and Technical College (NCTC) used the functional area approach for its self-study process by evaluating the criteria from the perspective of the major operating areas of the college. The major operating areas or functional areas of the college help define the frame of reference for each the subcommittees. Each subcommittee evaluated the college from the framework or perspective of their functional area. Thus, the employees serving on the various functional subcommittees of the college looked at each criterion from diverse points of view. The college's rationale for this decision was as follows:

- Northland Community College and Northwest Technical College merged into Northland Community and Technical College in 1995. Historically, the two colleges co-existed as separate institutions with their own specialized missions, philosophies, and purposes. Although the two colleges became one institution on paper, the employees of the college were still evolving in a cultural transition to change perceptions, organizational climate, and language in order to become one college. At the beginning of the self-study process, barriers existed that were impeding employee dialogue and work.
- The functional model did positively assist in changing the college culture. Also, this approach encouraged a fairly high level of participation in the self-study from all constituents and did result in a holistic evaluation of the college.
- The process of employees working together, without regard to union membership or department designation, for the purpose of accomplishing a self-study did promote further dialogue and an increased awareness of the unique strengths and qualities that each employee and program area brings to the college. Also, this model encouraged employees to get to know one another and to learn from each other. Increased communication and interaction among employees helped to further develop an institutional culture that ultimately strengthened the college.

Develop a "Mission Possible" Timeline

Start with the draft timeline presented in the NCA *Handbook* as an initial framework. Consider other institutional events and priorities when planning your timeline. What will work on your campus? Do you have blocks of time and dates set aside to accomplish institutional tasks? Talk to publishing or printing companies now to determine necessary time frames for printing the Self-Study Report cover and final document. The discussion and evaluation of philosophical issues, such as the review of the mission and vision of the institution, should occur early in the self-study process. The evaluation and possible revision of philosophical statements need to be well-thought-out, and there should be a certain amount of "gel" time to allow people to live with the new ideas or proposed revisions. Due to Northland's recent consolidation, the discussions about philosophical issues were very important to the future of the college and the self-study process.

Identify Subcommittees

Once a model or method of approach is chosen, it is easier to identify subcommittees. Existing campus committees may be accessed as a valuable resource. Consider whether the existing campus committees have a broad constituent representation. Also, it may be helpful to establish an ad hoc subcommittee composed of some of the members of established campus committees as well as new members. Remember, one of the purposes of the self-study process is to be reflective and evaluative. Having "new" people come to a group provides the impetus for looking at policies, procedures, and processes from different perspectives. Although it may seem painfully obvious to the members of an established committee how the patterns of evidence are met, it may be beneficial to have "outsiders" collaborate in the evaluation of the patterns of evidence. Also, having students on the subcommittees brings a unique and rich perspective to these discussions.

How to Deal with Cultural Quagmires, Emotional Bogs, and Other Cliffhangers!

As is the case with most institutions today, Northland Community and Technical College was recovering from a tremendous amount of change and turmoil at the time of our self-study. I will not bore you with long saga of events—but believe me, NCTC has gone through and survived a lot! As a result of honest self-reflection, good planning, and commitment from the employees, I believe that our college is stronger and healthier for having completed our self-study process. Often, institutional cultures change slowly and require active change agents to facilitate change. Small, seemingly subtle changes may make a big difference.

- For example, we started using the term *employees* wherever possible instead of *faculty, staff,* and *administration.* This was a healthy cultural decision in an environment that was somewhat divided by union categories.
- Acknowledge past perceived injustices or hot issues, but limit the lamenting about the good old days. Capitalize upon what was good, and make logical connections to where the institution currently is.
- Recognize that strong emotions about issues are better than indifference! Look for the root of the strong emotions, and listen for the real messages being sent. Encouraging subcommittee members to write down the issues may help defuse volatile situations.
- Being a Self-Study Coordinator may make you privy to confidential or sensitive information that may not have direct implications to the Self-Study Report. If in doubt, clarify what may or may not be shared with others.
- Listen to all sides of an issue, and choose your wording and timing wisely in trying to present another group's perspective on hot issues.
- Recognize that the self-study process is bigger than one person and that the Self-Study Coordinator does not have to have all of the answers!
- The self-study process is more of an institutional journey than a final destination. Keeping focused on the process will ensure an excellent product.

Writing the Self-Study Report

It is important to recognize that the Self-Study Report will present a snapshot of the institution at a specific time and juncture. It is reasonable that some things may change from the time of printing the Self-Study Report to the time of the on-site visit. These changes can be communicated to the on-site team of Consultant-Evaluators through a memo or other forms of appropriate documentation. There comes a time when you have to say, "It is finished, and it is as representative of our institution as possible" and send it to the printer. Other key points are as follows:

- Make sure that the Self-Study Report is more evaluative than descriptive. Obviously, there needs to be enough description in the report for intended audiences to understand the culture and unique characteristics of the institution, but the purpose of the self-study process is to be reflective and evaluative of your specific institution.
- How honest should you be? Very honest! The Self-Study Report can be honest and sincere while still presenting the issues in a "cup-half-full" instead of a "cup-half-empty" perspective. One of the most insightful experiences that reinforced to me that we needed to be very honest about out institutional issues occurred as a result of hiring an outside consultant to help the college write an enrollment management plan. The consultant was on our campus for one and a half days and identified almost every key issue or area of concern that we had identified through several months of self-evaluation and reflection! Now if one good consultant could see all of this in one and a half days, how much more would several Consultant-Evaluators see in three days? The purpose of the Self-Study Report is not to air all of the institution's dirty laundry but to honestly, sincerely evaluate the institution's strengths in order to capitalize on them and to identify issues that need to be improved upon. In addition to identifying these issues, it is imperative for the Self-Study Report to document realistic plans to help the institution move forward in the achievement of its goals. Acknowledging successes and failures and exposing institutional strengths and weaknesses requires courage and integrity. This process is the opportune catalyst for change. The more honestly an institution embraces its own issues, the more likely it is that the institution will continue to grow and change for the better.
- Utilize the judgment and expertise of the Steering Committee to help determine what should and should not be in the Self-Study Report. This is helpful in situations when individuals have an ax to grind and their input does not reflect the general consensus of the group at large.

- ○ Don't waste a lot of time and effort duplicating information that is in other documents, such as the institution's catalog, student and employee handbooks, contracts, and so on. Evaluative comments about information in these documents are helpful, and specific quotes may be beneficial, but don't cut and paste whole published documents into the Self-Study Report.
- ○ Determine how often drafts of the various sections and the final Self-Study Report will be distributed to all employees.
- ○ Let the final draft of the Self-Study Report sit for a week or two. Go back and reread the whole document with a fresh mind for the last time before sending it to the printer.

Resource Room

Start collecting documents and pertinent information early! I would recommend setting up the Resource Room based upon the Criteria. Use open tables, three-ring binders, and magazine files to display the resources. Keep a running list of documents added to the Resource Room to create a final indexed list of the available resources. Have chairs spread around the room so that team members can comfortably read the documents. Decide early on a template for covers and spines to be inserted in the three-ring binders. Request that chairpersons and department heads start compiling their resources early and put them into logical categories.

Tips on Preparing for the On-Site Visit

- ○ Consider conducting a mock on-site visit prior to the real one. This was an extremely valuable experience for Northland Community and Technical College!
- ○ Be specific about the qualifications or characteristics your institution is looking for in the Consultant-Evaluators. For example, we knew that we needed to improve on assessment, and we asked NCA to include someone with expertise in this area.
- ○ Remember that the Consultant-Evaluators wear two hats. They will evaluate the Self-Study Report and other documents for accuracy to ensure that the Criteria for Accreditation and General Institutional Requirements are addressed. In addition to this evaluative role, the team also functions in the consultant role. Consultant-Evaluators are in a position to really help the institution achieve its goals through their input. They are real people invested in helping the institution while meeting NCA's delegated functions. Our Consultant-Evaluators were excellent, kind, and very helpful to the institution!
- ○ Collaborate with the Team Chairperson to establish an agenda for the on-site visit. Be prepared to discuss lodging and other travel arrangements. Ask about special dietary needs or other necessary accommodations.
- ○ On the days of the visit, have people assigned to escort team members to the appropriate meeting places.
- ○ Creature comforts are appreciated. Ask what kinds of beverages are preferred. In addition to meals, have portable snacks available, such as fruit, nuts, mints, and something for the sweet tooth. The team members put in long days and appreciate thoughtful touches. Don't go overboard, but make them comfortable.

Specific Strategies Northland Used to Increase Student and Employee Awareness Prior to the Visit

- ○ We placed tent cards with pertinent information on tables in areas such as the cafeteria or lounges. This raised students' awareness about the impending on-site visit and explained its purpose.
- ○ Employees participated in a button design logo contest. We had the winning idea made into pin-on buttons and distributed the buttons to employees and student leaders.
- ○ Other creative ideas generated from the button design logo contest were used as part of some wonderful bulletin board displays. Also, employees and students used themes related to accreditation and one of the criteria on bulletin boards in areas such as the Learning Center and the library.
- ○ We utilized our internal communication systems to provide timely information to employees. For example, brief summaries were presented in our college employee and student weekly newsletters. The college newspaper published articles related to the on-site visit.

- The college's mission and vision statements were placed on the intercampus electronic bulletin system and on a large-screen TV in the commons area. The computer operations center technicians magically placed new screen savers on the computer lab monitors that reminded users about NCA.
- A series of one-page informational flyers were emailed to all employees and posted around campus during the final days just prior to the on-site visit.

Conclusions

As a first time Self-Study Coordinator, I was professionally challenged by this task. I was given the opportunity to move out of my comfort zone and to broaden my knowledge base in numerous areas. One of the most satisfying personal and professional outcomes that I realized was the opportunity to network with so many wonderfully creative and innovative professionals within and external to our institution. The mission of completing a self-study process is impossible for one individual to accomplish. However, as your constituents collaborate to accomplish institutional goals and achieve milestone after milestone by completing each step in your institutional timeline, you will one day soon be able to say, "Mission Accomplished!"

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Understanding Your Campus Culture Is Key to Self-Study Success

Gloria Dohman
Harvey Link

The self-study process appears to be overwhelming at first, but with careful planning and attention to detail, it can be both manageable and rewarding. Throughout the years, the North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) has found that engaging in a purposeful planning process is central to the success of a project of the magnitude of an NCA self-study.

Becoming familiar with the NCA expectations and requirements is a critical first step in this process, but nearly as important is knowing your institution's organizational structure and culture. Without a clear understanding of these two factors, it will be very difficult to successfully complete a quality self-study. It is the purpose of this paper to explore the planning approach that was used at NDSCS during our recent self-study, and to share some of the rationale behind the various steps.

First, it must be made clear that there is no "right way" or "best way" to complete a self-study. So much depends on the organization and the culture that permeates it. The purpose of this discussion is to help institutions realize the need to design a process that is right for their own organization. With a successful planning process, the implementation of the plan becomes much easier.

Familiarize Leadership

Who will lead the self-study process? For that matter, who will have the ultimate responsibility for assuring that the institution is successful in meeting the accreditation standards set forth by NCA? It may be a director or coordinator of assessment, a vice president or dean of instruction, or even the president. Whoever these individuals are, it is critical that very early in the process they become intimately familiar with the expectations and requirements of NCA related to accreditation. Attending NCA Annual Meetings and accreditation workshops, visiting with colleagues who have recently completed the accreditation process, and meeting with the institution's NCA staff liaison are just a few ways to start. But don't wait to get started; it will take more than one meeting to get all of the information you will need.

In the early stages of planning, it is especially important that the senior leadership of the institution support and demonstrate knowledge of the accreditation expectations and requirements. It is critical to send a clear message to the college about the importance of the endeavor as well as the magnitude of the project at hand.

At NDSCS the familiarization process began well before the inception of the NCA self-study. The institution was fortunate that the college president was serving as a NCA Consultant-Evaluator and had an excellent working knowledge of the goals and objectives of the process. The college had also actively participated in NCA Annual Meetings by having one or more individuals attend for the preceding several years, and began to strategically increase the number and makeup of individuals attending in the years leading up to the self-study. Conversations with the college's NCA liaison proved very helpful in providing insights that matched the needs of the campus. All of this proved helpful to the process.

Designate Lead Personnel

Who will lead and coordinate the process on a daily basis? Who will write the Self-Study Report, and what about an editor? These are probably not your senior administrators, as they will not be able to dedicate the amount of time and effort to do the task effectively. However, it is important to identify at an early stage the personnel who will lead the effort on a daily basis and to allot adequate time for these responsibilities. Whoever will be charged with guiding the self-study must have enough time to become the resident expert in accreditation and needs to be intimately involved in determining how the self-study will be conducted.

In preparation for the reaccreditation process at NDSCS, the college established the position of Director of Assessment and Institutional Research. This position was filled by an individual who was familiar with the campus and knowledgeable about assessment and accreditation. The establishment of a full-time position for this purpose was central in demonstrating the importance the college was placing on these initiatives. Most importantly, it gave a focus and qualified leadership to the effort. This individual provided daily guidance and coordination of the process and also became the primary author of the self-study document.

Evaluate Campus Culture

What type of organizational culture exists on your campus? Are employees empowered and encouraged to function in a primarily self-directed manner, or is the decision making process centralized, with the majority of the leadership coming from a handful of individuals? What about the committee and employee work-group structure; does it function smoothly and effectively? Whatever the structure or organizational culture that is in place at the time, it is critical that the self-study process complement and draw on its strengths. Now is not the time to introduce a major deviation in how your organization functions!

At NDSCS the faculty and staff had been involved with a major total quality initiative for several years, so it was natural for a very decentralized and highly interactive process to be established. In fact, it was at this point that the theme of the study, "A Spirit of Continuous Improvement," began to emerge.

Develop Strategy

What type of self-study strategy will effectively use the structure and culture of the campus to meet the NCA expectations and requirements? Who develops the blueprint for action? What processes are in place that can be built on? How will all of this be communicated to the greater campus? What are the timelines? Who is responsible for what? Will the process meet with NCA's approval?

At this point, the true planning process really takes place. What happens here will guide the rest of the activities, and it is critical that this step not be shortchanged in either time or effort. It may be designed by a relatively small group, but it is imperative for those taking part to be very familiar with the NCA requirements and accreditation process as well as to have an excellent working knowledge of the campus.

At NDSCS it was the goal to integrate the self-study into the daily routine of the campus and to demonstrate that the processes used to analyze and evaluate were continuous and sustainable once the team site visit was completed. The challenge was to gather and organize the information in a manner that addressed the expectations of NCA for the Self-Study Report, especially as it related to how the GIRs and criteria were being met. To do this, a thoughtful review of what structures were already in place and what would need to be added in order to accomplish a meaningful self-study was necessary. Following this, a process was established that complemented the campus culture and organizational structure. It also reinforced the importance of data collection for continuous improvement.

A process for selecting steering committee members, finalizing the plan, establishing timelines, communicating with the campus, initiating and conducting the study, writing the report, and other related steps fell into place once the initial planning activities were completed. Because NDSCS had been operating under a philosophy of continuous improvement for a number of years, there was a wealth of information collected that could be incorporated into the self-study and become the basis for analysis and evaluation. Therefore, it was hoped the culture and structure of the institution would become the framework for the self-study.

Secure "Buy-In"

Will the planned process work? Is it compatible with the campus organization? Has anything been forgotten? Will it be supported by formal and informal campus leadership groups? Are the timelines realistic? Have adequate resources been allocated? How will the plan or process be communicated to the rest of the campus?

Critical to the success of the self-study process is wide involvement of all constituencies on the campus: faculty, staff, and students. Until now, the proposed process has probably been developed by a reasonably small group of individuals. The need to share it with an ever greater number of influential campus members is critical. Meetings to seek the input from key academic administrators, faculty leaders, students, and prospective steering committee members is an important step in securing their buy-in. It is also a means of gathering valuable feedback and suggestions for improvements. This feedback should be taken very seriously, as it will form the basis of support for the process.

At NDSCS this process began with both formal and informal discussions taking place between those developing the process and other key academic leaders. Frequent conversations and updates at relevant committee meetings proved helpful in beginning to acquaint the campus with the proposed process. It also helped solicit feedback about potential modifications that could improve the process. This also helped identify strong candidates to serve on the steering committee.

Finalize Plan and Timelines

Is the process realistic and doable? What will NCA think of the plan? Do the timelines make sense? Once the plan is designed, it needs to be forwarded to the institution's NCA staff liaison for review and approval. It is the goal of NCA that each institution have a meaningful and successful self-study, so it is important that the plan be workable and realistic in nature. The NCA liaison is a valuable resource whom each institution can draw on. In addition, this step provides a point at which both NCA and the institution can measure whether the project is on track for successful completion.

At NDSCS the guidelines provided in the NCA *Handbook* proved very useful in establishing preliminary timelines for the project. Anticipated assignments were made and discussed with those who would be responsible for them. The plan was finalized and approved by the College Council and submitted to the institution's NCA liaison. Regular contact with the campus liaison proved very helpful during this time.

Implement Strategy

Now the real work will begin. The blueprint for action has been established, and it is time to implement it. A procedure to check the progress of the project is needed to be certain that all the actions remain consistent with the plan. The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle is critical at this point. With a well-thought-out plan in place, you should be ready to launch into a successful self-study.

NDSCS used the following primary steps to complete a successful self-study. Remember though, the process should be customized to meet the needs of the specific institution being reviewed. The Self-Study Coordinator kept the team on task and organized the details that follow:

- The NCA Steering Team members who were identified represented a cross-section of faculty, administrative positions, and years of service. The Steering Team was given a job description with timelines as well as training to familiarize members with the self-study requirements.
- The data collection process was finalized, and existing committees were assigned specific/appropriate GIRs and/or parts of the five criteria to respond to. Steering Team members were assigned as liaisons to each committee. Each committee received a common reporting format and a deadline for data submission. Reflective questions on each criterion were developed to help committees understand the intent of the criterion.
- The Self-Study Coordinator monitored and supported the committees by providing a common resource area and a clearinghouse for questions. Data were reviewed as they were submitted by committees, and it was determined whether the information was complete and evaluative in nature.

- The Self-Study Coordinator compiled the data into a draft Self-Study Report, which was reviewed by the Steering Team and placed on the campus web page for general review and feedback.
- The self-study was finalized, approved by College Council, and submitted.
- The importance of communication cannot be overemphasized. Clear expectations need to be established, as well as specific deadlines. The campus needs to be kept continuously informed of progress, and their input valued.

The process NDSCS used resulted in a successful accreditation and team visit. It involved a majority of people on campus using existing structures and reinforced the importance of data collection for continuous improvement. Planning is the key to success within the framework of the institution's culture and includes the support of administration.

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Is It Almost Over or Just Beginning? Preparing for the Visit

Kaylen Betzig
Ann Marie Krause

Introduction

Blackhawk Technical College (BTC) is one of sixteen technical colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Founded in the early 1900s and accredited by NCA in 1978, BTC continues to serve approximately 18,000 (5000 credit and 13,000 non-credit) students from south central Wisconsin by providing up-to-date courses and programs in technical, basic skills, apprenticeship, and continuing education. While the majority of classes are held at Central Campus, classes may also be offered at the Aviation, Monroe, North Rock County, and Beloit Centers.

In March 2000 BTC was granted continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years following a very successful team visit. The three-year process leading to the reaccreditation was embraced by the entire college community and led to renewed energy for continuous improvement. The selection of a faculty member and an administrator to co-coordinate the entire process was key to the establishment of a team atmosphere that resulted in buy-in and support from all levels of the college.

The NCA Planning Team conducted initial planning and organization of the self-study process. The team was comprised of the President, two Vice-Presidents, two Self-Study Coordinators, a former Self-Study Coordinator, and an Institutional Advancement data specialist. This team functioned throughout the process to provide oversight and direction for self-study teams as they carried out their tasks. These individuals were key to removing roadblocks, resolving issues, and determining recognition. The NCA Steering Team was then selected by the Planning Team to provide leadership and direction for each of the twelve self-study teams. Members were selected by length of service to the college, diversity, and representation of different levels and divisions of the college. The self-study teams were then organized to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of all BTC programs and services. All full-time faculty, staff, and administration participated on a study team. Each team presented an oral report to the Steering Team and then wrote a report summarizing its findings and providing patterns of evidence for strengths and opportunities for improvement. These reports were the basis for the self-study document.

Based on our experiences as coordinators of the self-study process, the time spent organizing the teams, creating and adhering to timelines, and communicating with all levels of the organization and community members was crucial to the success of BTC's reaccreditation visit. We began with the "end in mind."

20–20 Hindsight: Reflections on the BTC Road to Reaccreditation

In the paragraphs that follow we share some of our observations and the lessons we learned in building and leading our successful self-study team.

- ◇ **Being organized.** While it is admirable to involve the entire college, it is unrealistic to expect 100 percent participation throughout the entire process. In the times designated as NCA work times there was good participation. Overall during the process we had about 65 percent participation. Staff attrition, especially in leadership positions, was a concern. Also as new staff members were hired, we had to decide how to involve them in the process. Selection of team leaders and members for the different self-study teams was important so that a true evaluation of the area(s) was done. Several staff members who had not been previously known as leaders were cultivated as team leaders and blossomed in their new assignments. We attempted to involve students on teams, but we did not receive good participation. Although students were invited to be team members, often interest fell off quickly.

As NCA coordinators we soon learned how important it was to have the support of upper levels of the administration. Our president and vice-presidents were very available, listened to our concerns and recommendations, and assisted us in any way they could. We were truly empowered to make this process work and, therefore, we grew as leaders. It was a wonderful professional development opportunity for us.

◇ **Adhering to timelines.** Timelines are critical. We made them. We stuck to them and made all teams accountable for them. We were successful in maintaining the timelines we originally established. It is important to coordinate the number of surveys as well how and when they are administered. It is very easy to overload the college staff with surveys requesting input.

◇ **Enhancing communication.** Communication needs to be centralized. As Self-Study Coordinators, we made communication our responsibility and our priority. We had a plan for communication and understood there can never be too much. We use different media to make it unique and fun. Some of the avenues we used were radio talk shows; newspaper releases; inservice presentations, games, and activities; email, all-school memos on special NCA paper; catchy slogans that appeared everywhere; internal newsletter articles; intranet; Internet; presentations to service groups in the community, advisory committees, BTC Foundation, and BTC Board; videos; and an Executive Summary of the Self-Study Report.

◇ **Maintaining focus.** There is a delicate balance between maintaining focus and burning out the staff. Again, consistent communication is critical. The college community can get so focused on achieving a ten-year reaccreditation that it can lose sight of the college's primary commitment to continual evaluation and improvement. We used fun activities, humor, and special recognition to keep the teams moving forward. It was also important for us to effectively communicate that this self-study was a college commitment and not the Self-Study Coordinators' project or perspective. College ownership was imperative.

◇ **Handling conflicts.** Most issues were resolved during Steering and Planning Team meetings. Planning Team members served as liaisons to each self-study team to help remove roadblocks, answer questions, and bring issues back to Steering Team meetings to be discussed. As Self-Study Coordinators, we were constantly mediating. Issues centered on territorial themes, release time, compensation, and clarification of team charges. We addressed the conflicts and misunderstandings right away and centered on the process and not making it personal. We remained upfront with expectations and looked for win-wins.

◇ **Involving the Board.** We met with our District Board monthly for a period of fifteen months prior to the visit. We reviewed the self-study team reports, emphasized areas on which they should focus, and role-played possible interview questions. The time spent with the Board members was well worth it. They became our greatest cheerleaders; they learned a lot about our organization; they felt they were an important part of the process; and they set the tone for the entire on-site visit. The on-site team made many comments during their visit about our knowledgeable board and its passion for what we do at BTC.

◇ **Writing the Report.** As coordinators, we scheduled time to write in a location that was relatively interruption-free. We allowed six months to write the report, knowing we were also continuing to perform our regular assignments at BTC. We searched out examples of good Self-Study Reports, determined the organization of the document, and used the self-study team reports as the basis for our content. Getting good, evaluative reports from the teams was crucial to our success. Sending out multiple drafts to all interested staff to critique to ensure we were keeping the original intent for each self-study team was a priority for us. Still, as we look back, there are a couple of areas we would merge. For example, we would combine the chapters on student services and academic support as both refer to necessary support services for our students.

Establishing a single voice for the document actually was pretty easy. As coordinators/writers our writing styles were very similar. We enlisted a cadre of editors to help us, and they proved invaluable. We also established early a relationship with the person who would be desktop publishing our document (a current staff member who wanted this challenge) and subsequently with the printer. This saved us time, money, and many gray hairs. We learned a lot about the writing process in general. In retrospect, our document was too lengthy (about 250 pages); yet it served our purposes and remains a workable document as we address the stated opportunities for improvement. The NCA on-site team commended us on the evaluative nature of the report.

◇ **Adding an addendum.** There is always a time lag when writing the report. Just before we sent the final document to the printer, we added an addendum briefly explaining changes that had occurred. We organized the addendum by chapter and bulleted the main items. The NCA on-site team found this section helpful, because it was evidence that BTC was already moving ahead with making changes based on the self-study team findings.

- **Using technology.** We discovered that using technology expedited communication, though it shouldn't be the sole method used. We placed drafts of the self-study on the intranet for review, conducted surveys on the Internet, and placed third party comment notices on our web page. In addition, we had a 20 minute video produced explaining the mission of our college, introducing our administrative team and divisional areas, and highlighting what weather, amenities, etc., the on-site team should expect as they arrived at our campus. The NCA on-site team found this video to be especially effective in preparing for their visit. We also used video technology to explain the NCA process to our staff and advisory committees. While time consuming, these activities were well worth it.

  During the actual visit, technology was made available in the resource room (fax, phones, computers, printers, and a TV/VCR). Also, we assigned a technology staff person to be available to assist team members as needed.

- **Finding those Self-Study Coordinators during the visit.** Looking back, we jokingly say we were on call 24/7. While that is not necessarily true, we can say we were pretty much on call from the time the team arrived on campus Sunday evening until they left at noon on Wednesday. We had cell phones, and the team members called us frequently with questions; requests for information; requests to set up interviews, meal reservations, etc. Accessibility was the key, and again the on-site team commended us on our approach and promptness to their requests. We established a work area for ourselves near the resource room and were the first point of contact for all of their requests. We arranged to have someone in every department and division on alert to help us find specific materials. Our goal was rapid response.

- **Building a resource room.** Although the resource room is officially compiled right before the visit, one must keep its organization in the forefront of one's mind at all times. We started building the resource room right after we finished the writing process, while the evidence we needed was still fresh in our minds. The best thing we did was to require the self-study teams to submit patterns of evidence (POE) with their written reports. We were then able to pull the things we needed from their files and make copies. We organized our bins by chapter and cross-referenced duplicated POEs. We also bookmarked patterns such as curriculum and web pages on computers that we had in the resource room. Our resource room was centrally located on the main campus. We were able to split a meeting room in half, reserving one half as a work area and the other as a break area that could also be used for one-on-one interviews. We also had a work room/meeting room available at the hotel that was set up with computers and printer, supplies, and refreshments.

- **Building an on-site agenda.** The on-site team chair establishes the agenda for the team visit. We used email to work with our team leader to adjust interview schedules, the Board dinner, outreach center visits, etc. The process was effective, and the team adhered to the schedule. We provided goodies in the hotel rooms for all team members as they arrived. The Self-Study Coordinators and the college president greeted the team members at the hotel the first evening before the dinner with the District Board. This put a personal touch on their arrival. Every team is different, so we established contact with our team leader through our college president soon after we knew the composition of the team.

- **Sending materials to the team.** We followed NCA's guidelines for sending materials to the visiting team. In addition to having the required items, we provided some extras that the team appreciated. In the packets we included the "Get to Know BTC" video, maps of the area, and hotel brochures. Team members knew exactly what to expect on arrival.

- **Taking time to say "Thanks."** As Self-Study Coordinators we believed recognition, no matter how simple, was important. We decided not to wait until the end to say thank you. Our college supported this recognition of efforts throughout the self-study process. Every college employee received NCA 2000 note cubes, BTC mouse pads, new nametags, and team T-shirts. We surprised self-study teams with treats during team meetings. Team leaders also received etched appreciation plaques. Since all self-study team members had done their jobs well, the exit interview with the on-site team resulted in smiles all around and a time of rejoicing. Therefore, following the visit, the BTC Foundation sponsored a celebration pasta lunch for the entire staff. The Self-Study Coordinators served the lunch.

Where the Road Is Leading Us: Is It Almost Over or Just Beginning?

Having successfully completed a self-study and gained a ten-year reaccreditation, BTC congratulated itself and then went to work on the recommendations, preparing for the next visit in 2009–2010. The self-study findings have been incorporated into strategic and work plans for all areas of the college. We are using the self-study as a benchmark and have created a system to monitor changes that are being made. Thus, the college is positioning itself for continual improvement and evaluation. The college has made a commitment to keep the energy alive for improvement. The Self-

Study Coordinators, though tired and worn, are committed to monitoring progress, and if asked, would say, "Yes, we'll do this again!"

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Designing an Integrated Non-Intrusive Self-Study for Your Institution

John Speary

When Butler County Community College began its self-study process in the spring of 1997, one of the individuals selected to serve as Self-Study Coordinator had worked as a subcommittee co-chair in the self-study conducted ten years earlier. Reflections on the difficulties of that earlier process and insights gained from self-study mentoring received at the NCA Annual Meetings yielded some helpful principles that made the successful self-study completed in 2000 a much more positive and less painful experience for all involved. The primary purpose of this self-study mentoring session will be to share those reflections and insights with other Self-Study Coordinators who are still early on in the process.

The Challenge

Picture this: it has been seven (possibly eight) years since the last NCA Team Visit to your community college, which resulted in a successful ten-year extension of your institution's accreditation. In three (possibly two) short years, the next Team Visit will be on the institutional horizon. The time has come to begin a formal institution-wide self-study process again, which will yield the required self-study document and eventually another much desired ten-year extension to your accreditation. The Commission's requirements are stated clearly and succinctly. Your college must examine its effectiveness, assess the strengths and concerns found in all segments of its operation, and plan how to make the most of those strengths and address those concerns. The self-study must focus on the full range of the institution's mission and purposes. Because the self-study should look at the entire institution, it is crucial that the process involve as broad a range of the college's constituents as possible. You have been chosen as co-ordinator for the self-study process.

A community college, armed with relatively limited resources of people, money, and time, and faced with the formidable task of conducting a self-study, may find the challenge almost overwhelmingly intrusive. The normal operations of the college become congested with an elaborate network of temporary activities that seem to exist only for the sake of the self-study process. The complex efforts to create required patterns of evidence that will document the college's achievement of the five criteria may seem disconnected from the regular ongoing operations of the institution. If the college leadership has had the foresight to create and maintain an ongoing process of perpetual self-study (that meaningfully references the NCA criteria) through its institutional effectiveness assessment and/or program review, then the task of the self-study required by North Central will not be so daunting. However, such foresight is not often the case. If the self-study process is rather seen as a once-in-a-decade task to satisfy accreditation requirements, the monolithic challenge of accomplishing a successful self-study can become painfully intrusive to the regular functions of the community college.

Seemingly, the burden of this task, at least initially, lies at the feet of the individual(s) who has been designated as Self-Study Coordinator(s). That individual may have never experienced such intensive complexities as involved in facilitating such a far-ranging and, in many senses, ambiguous project. The Self-Study Coordinator may be overwhelmed by a sense of personal responsibility in trying to corral such a mysterious phantom beast, the institutional self-study. The coordinator can save herself a great deal of grief while helping the institution avoid a number of common, perfectly understandable, but unfortunate pitfalls along the path toward the completion of an effective, useful, and thereby successful self-study.

Creating an Effective Steering Committee

Steering committees that seem to represent only certain parts of the institution, or that are overloaded with administrative personnel, or that are more of a group of dignitaries than working individuals will not be effective in moving the self-study process along. The Self-Study Coordinator should work with the school's administration to recruit a large, genuinely broad-based steering committee made up of respected hard working leaders from all areas of the college's constituency. The steering committee roster should contain representatives from all levels of the institution's operation:

- Various strata of administrators
- Faculty from all academic and vocational divisions
- Staff from all ranks of student services and instructional support
- Operational employees who maintain the day-to-day mechanics of the college
- Members representing different segments of the student population
- Individuals from the larger community impacted by the college's operation.

Careful consideration of the mix of personality types and working styles must impact the selection of steering committee members. There is an enormous diversity in the tasks involved in the completion of a self-study. The steering committee membership should consist of individuals with an equally diverse range of talents. A proven willingness to contribute in active and meaningful ways to given tasks must be the most basic trademark of anyone considered an appropriate selection for inclusion on a steering committee.

The size of the committee can grow too large to be manageable in scheduling meetings. However, merely being smaller and more easily scheduled is not necessarily better. The task of the self-study is very large and broad in scope, and even at the leadership level many well-chosen hands make much lighter the work. A shrewd appreciation of the mania of activity that is characteristic of the contemporary educational community can help in creating an effective steering committee. Scheduling a meeting that everyone can attend is an almost impossible goal. A productive steering committee can operate on a "buddy system" from its very inception. If a pair of committee members heads up each subcommittee or task area from the start, the chances are much greater that at least one representative from each task area will be able to attend any given meeting and keep that area actively in touch with the larger body on a regular basis.

The coordinator must focus a good deal of attention early on providing necessary and sufficient orientation and training for steering committee members so that they are familiar and at least reasonably comfortable with the demands and benefits of the tasks they face. A thorough familiarity with the NCA *Handbook* and representative self-study documents from other schools must be a priority for the coordinator entering into the process. The steering committee as a whole should familiarize themselves with the NCA requirements for accreditation and guidelines for self-study. Easy access to the *Handbook of Accreditation* is a very good thing. Steering committee members who are exposed to self-study documents from comparable institutions will have a clearer understanding of what they are about and will have more confidence in pursuing the goal of the useful self-study. An effective Self-Study Coordinator will work with the steering committee to construct specific job descriptions that clarify and facilitate the effective delegation of reasonable shared responsibility throughout the self-study process. Unquestionably, most persons feel much more comfortable when they can clearly see the target they are trying to hit.

Pacing the Process

The elusive character of time is not different in the world of higher education than in any other. Two or three years rush by before you can believe it possible. A Self-Study Coordinator must insist on the creation of a feasible long-range timeline for the self-study process. That timeline must realistically reflect the demands of the project alongside the daily dynamics of the institution's operations. Those who generate such a timeline must recognize how the institutional culture functions in terms of the completion of college-wide tasks. An unrealistic timeline that aspires to the ideal and ignores established patterns of behavior among the self-study participants is doomed to futility. However, planners must allow for flexibility within the projected deadlines for different stages of the self-study process. Crises will inevitably arise that force unavoidable delays so the timeline must not be designed to plunge the participants into a last-minute panic when such delays occur. A reasonable timeline that reflects the flow of the college and paces the process over an extended period of time will help integrate the self-study effort into the day-to-day operation of the institution in a nonintrusive way.

If those constructing the timeline shape it as an action plan, including not only the tasks to be completed and their projected dates for completion but also the responsible parties for each task, they will find the timeline to be a more meaningful and effective tool. The steering committee should see a close relationship between the job descriptions and the timeline its members produce. Successful coordinators will review progress with the steering committee periodically so they can refine and republish the timeline, putting particular emphasis on celebrating the completion of different stages of the process. Regular updates to the college community at large keeps the goal in focus and the efforts of all involved on task. A coordinator who can exert firm encouragement while expressing compassionate flexibility regarding the inevitability of reasonable delays will receive desired results in a much more relaxed working atmosphere.

Structuring the Self-Study

The self-study document must present patterns of evidence that demonstrate the manner in which the college satisfies the five NCA Criteria for Accreditation. The steering committee must decide how best to approach that task. The strategy and structure of the self-study process will ultimately determine the organization and focus of the self-study document and should not evidence only the fulfillment of the five criteria. Both the process and the document should clearly reflect the particular character of the college being studied. A coordinator should lead the steering committee through a careful analysis of the existing organizational structure of the institution. This analysis will find the correlation between the accreditation criteria and the mission and purposes of the various departments, programs, and service units of the college. For instance, the activities of certain departments in the college such as Human Resources, Accounts Payable, and Buildings and Grounds most directly address the issues raised by Criterion Two. Existing academic assessment programs and institutional effectiveness offices pertain to Criterion Three, and so forth. A self-study will make more sense to the realities of the college if it is structured first around the existing architecture of the organization and then correlated to the criteria presented in the Handbook.

Steering committee members will function most efficiently if they are organized as co-chairs of subcommittees sharing the various responsibilities for research and documentation. Each subcommittee will focus on one functional dimension of the college's operation. The subcommittee will either look at existing documentation or generate new documents to produce the patterns of evidence necessary to address the relevant criteria for its focus area. As the process progresses, subcommittees will produce reports that reflect a careful critique of existing operations within that area of the college. These subcommittee reports then dovetail together, easily forming the major body of the final Self-Study Report. The Self-Study Coordinator or whoever serves as the writer/editor of the document will be able to construct the final document from the rich resources the steering committee provides. There does not need to be any sense in which the writer/editor of the final document is starting from scratch.

Utilizing Human Resources

A wise college administration will endorse the broadest possible base of participation in the self-study by the employees of the institution. All full-time employees should have the opportunity to make some contribution to the process. Subcommittees made up of personnel employed in the area being studied working alongside representatives from all other sectors of the college will be able to analyze the operation of each area in an informed, positive, yet critical manner. The likelihood that there will be total universal participation is not great. However, the more people across the institution who are involved, the more the self-study will seem to be part of the fabric of the institution; ultimately, the more useful the observations made in the self-study will be. If a major portion of the college constituency is involved, there will be greater sense of ownership in the project. The whole college community should be exposed regularly to the progress of analysis and given opportunity for input.

The Self-Study Coordinator must realistically assess the strengths and weaknesses of the workers involved in the process. One of the workers whose strengths and weaknesses must be assessed most accurately is the coordinator. Some leaders are best at organizational planning, some at facilitating meetings, some at structuring research efforts, and so forth. Most individuals chosen as coordinators will have many varied strengths, but will not have all strengths. The effective coordinator will capitalize on his or her own strengths and look to others more equipped to bolster points of weakness. For example, the coordinator may or may not feel well-equipped to handle the writing/editing of the final document. Most coordinators will find it best to share this responsibility with at least one other person with appropriate expertise.

Addressing the Demands of Research

Another area of weakness for the coordinator may be in handling the kind of systematic research that accreditation self-study demands. If this is the case, the coordinator will certainly not be alone in this concern. Research of the caliber called for in a self-study is often an intimidating task for many who will need to be involved in the self-study process. The broad range of programs and services that must be assessed is daunting. The volume of research documentation that results from such assessment is formidable. When a community college employee looks at another institution's representative self-study document, that document has an appearance comparable to a major thesis or dissertation. The seeming magnitude of the task as compared to the normal daily activities of that employee may prompt the self-study participant to feel unequipped for the research task.

If the coordinator is not a research specialist, he or she should engage in-house experts on research methods (a director of institutional research, if available) to help design plans for conducting the necessary research. Members of the college constituency who would not ordinarily consider themselves researchers will be much more comfortable doing such work when carefully guided by individuals with much more research experience. Carefully constructed research plans that lead the participant through a systematic process of document analysis serve as an excellent supplement to the comforting guidance received from the initial job description. The whole function of steering subcommittees benefits from the formulation of overall research plans that direct their efforts. A research specialist serves as an invaluable resource for the structuring of patterns of evidence addressing the accreditation criteria. Such a research expert can also help the leadership of subcommittees recognize existing documentation that will serve their purposes. Self-study participants should always avoid generating new documentation when records that meet their needs already exist.

A Crucial Leadership Strategy

An effective steering committee coordinator must never neglect one particular leadership strategy: delegate, delegate, delegate. Self-study coordination is not a healthy place to employ micromanagement. You can not take care of everything. You should not try to take care of everything. You can, however, seek to bring together a talented diverse company of workers who can agree on a reasonable time frame and strategies to accomplish their varied tasks. At the beginning of the self-study, you should work to help your staffers feel as equipped and aware of their specific tasks as possible. As the process progresses, you can communicate with them to oversee, encourage, and, hopefully at most, troubleshoot to solve problems when they unexpectedly but inevitably arise. If the Self-Study Coordinator does not entrust the majority of the task to other talented, dependable individuals, the self-study will be an utterly intrusive element in the life of the coordinator, if not the college as a whole.

A Final Observation

It would seem that the fewer people actively involved in the self-study process, the less intrusive the process would be to the ongoing operation of the college. However, a self-study that grows out of limited participation will not project an accurate picture of the character of the institution. The efforts of a small group of workers who gather information for analysis on a "hit and run" basis will seem all the more intrusive to the larger college constituency who have no clear point of contact with the self-study process. The conclusions of such a self-study would enjoy no ownership on the part of the larger college community and would, therefore, be ultimately of very little use to the future of the institution. A Self-Study Coordinator will best serve the college and the self-study process by encouraging as broad-based and well-informed participation in the task as possible.

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Using Your Mission Statement

Vickie Hess

Introduction

An institutional self-study is a massive undertaking. The criteria are general and flexible—deliberately so, in order that each institution might have the opportunity to provide an educational experience that is uniquely suited to its heritage, clientele, and purposes. However, to those charged with the responsibility for producing a self-study, the generality and flexibility can be daunting. While suggested patterns of evidence provide some clues, they do not provide the organizing theme for what will in all likelihood be a 200–300 page document. The process of self-study is not merely a checklist of standards (although those minimal standards do exist, as reflected in the General Institutional Requirements). It is, rather, an opportunity for an institution to ask itself the basic identity questions: Who are we? What are we trying to accomplish? Do we have what we need? Are we accomplishing our purposes, and can we continue to do so? Are we being true to our own sense of institutional identity? The "who are we" question is answered by the mission statement and made concrete by the statement of purposes derived from that mission. The mission and purpose statements provide structure, helping to focus attention on the major issues to be addressed within the document and making the document cohesive despite the diversity of activities examined in the self-study.

Source of the Mission Statement

There are two ways to view an institutional mission statement. Many of those who work at our institutions regard the mission statement as nothing more than a statement of ideals suitable for a catalog. The NCA, however, believes that we mean what we say in the mission statement, and bases the whole self-study process and team visit on what we say about ourselves. From this perspective, the mission statement and the purposes derived from that statement can provide dynamic guidance for institutional growth and development. The self-study process is an opportunity for an institution to reexamine its mission statement, change it if necessary, and use it as a guide for institutional improvement. Organizing the self-study plan from the mission and purposes ensures that the criteria are addressed, and that the evidence collected in the self-study process is relevant to the needs of the institution

The mission statement is a relatively short general statement of the institution's reason for being. Typically, the mission has significant continuity with the history of the institution. If the mission statement is to serve its purpose, it must reflect the institution's current ideals and identity. It might be necessary to lead the institution through the process of determining whether it does so, and revising the statement if need be. In our previous self-study, the revision of the mission statement was the first task undertaken. The changes made then were not substantial. However, the process of discussion, at least among the faculty, reaffirmed commitment to a well-defined mission at a time of significant institutional stress.

The most recent self-study came after a period of dramatic growth and on the heels of a two-year strategic planning process during which the mission statement was revised. While faculty and other constituents were represented on the task force and were consulted via polls and focus groups, it was the Strategic Planning Task Force that proposed the wording of the mission statement. After the proposed statement was adopted by the Trustees, the administration and task force initiated an all-out effort to develop a sense of ownership among institutional constituents. The development of the mission statement and identification of priority areas was followed by the appointment of working groups to explore the implications of the new statement for academics, student life, financial affairs, and assessment.

Regardless of how the mission statement arises, and regardless of whether it is revised at the time of the self-study, it is important that the major constituencies on campus focus attention on the institutional mission. Before a self-study is complete, every office on campus has had input and has been asked for information; understanding of and ownership of the mission statement helps keep the internal research focused even before the document authors begin their work.

Institutional Purposes

If the requirement of institutional purposes did not exist, there would still be a need to develop a set of concrete statements of desired outcomes. At our institution, these were not developed with the mission statement; the vision and core values statements were too general to be used as purposes. They were instead developed by the Assessment working group in the implementation phase of the strategic planning process, and they were developed specifically because the Self-Study Coordinator insisted that they were needed for the NCA process. However, the purposes (in parallel with other internal documents) did help us solidify the new mission statement by forcing us to answer the questions: What will this institution look like if we fulfill this mission? What will our graduates look like? The purposes were broad enough so that every facet of campus life was addressed, but specific enough so that each area could recognize and address relevant purposes.

Creating Community

The maintenance of community at our institution has been a challenge for two reasons: quantitative growth and program diversity. In the decade between the previous self-study and the one just completed, the traditional student body nearly doubled and the faculty increased by nearly 50 percent. Nontraditional programs grew at even greater rates. The accompanying increase in numbers of employees with faculty status has, over the years, forced us to change the traditions that made the smaller institution a cohesive "family." Faculty dinners gave way to dessert receptions; meetings of the full faculty became sparsely attended; finding affordable locations for a fall retreat of the entire faculty became unmanageable. Clearly, community was no longer going to come about without intentionality.

Our institution grants degrees through two very different types of programs: traditional, campus-based programs serving mostly (but by no means entirely) 18–22-year-old resident students, and nontraditional programs in a variety of formats throughout our home state that address the needs of working adults seeking to extend their education. From its inception, the institution has recognized the need to find ways to maintain unity and community while allowing the Adult and Professional Studies Division the freedom to innovate to meet the needs of its constituency in a rapidly changing educational climate. While unity and diversity result in creative tension, focus on our mission and purposes has provided a common bond. While the Adult and Professional Studies Division programs have a different "look and feel" from those of the traditional campus, they seek to address and assess the same institutional purposes.

Community can no longer be based on our all knowing each other, our all working in the same geographic location, or even (except in the most general sense) our all doing the same thing. However, a strong sense of common mission does provide the glue to bond us into one institution. In the context of self-study, it was by using the mission and purposes as the major theme that we were able to demonstrate that we are truly one university.

Information Gathering

The information-gathering process can pose a number of challenges:

1. Some administrators are "big picture" people, and have a hard time getting past general statements and providing the necessary detail and documentation. Even with a representative steering committee, it is possible that some programs will be neglected entirely because no one knows to ask about them, and the appropriate administrator never mentions them.
2. Other administrators will provide overwhelming amounts of detail with no clear focus.
3. There is always a temptation to provide overly optimistic assessments of the performance of one's own area, without sufficient documentation.
4. There is also a temptation to use the self-study process to provide leverage with administration by claiming as "needs" or "challenges" the entire wish list of an area.

While none of these challenges is completely unavoidable, they can be reduced by providing clear structure and getting responses from those with direct responsibility for the program. In our case, we asked for responses from the directors of administrative areas and from the chairpersons of academic divisions (or program directors in Adult and Professional Studies).

The structure that we provided asked each unit to begin with a set of three-five goals. They were to explain how their goals fit the institutional purposes. From there they could tell us what major changes had occurred since the last self-study; what their strengths, challenges, and opportunities were; and how they assessed these. Where appropriate, particularly in academic areas, we requested assessment and other data. We emphasized the need to document any claims that were made. Having the units begin by tying their goals to the institutional purposes gave these preliminary reports a focus that they might not otherwise have had. The focus on purposes also provided some boundaries to the collection and presentation of data; it was not necessary to collect every possible piece of information, but rather to collect information needed to support the response to the purposes.

Writing the Document

One of the major difficulties in actually writing a self-study is making sense of the vast amount and diversity of information. The criteria can provide a basis for organizing the document, but some of its sections will be large and involved. For us, the mission and purposes provided the framework for pulling together the information into a coherent document.

Conclusion

From the perspective of the accreditation process, the institutional mission and purposes form the identity of that institution. NCA is not prescriptive in defining what a "good" college or university is; rather, we are asked to define, within the very broad traditions of higher education, what type of institution we mean to be and what particular kind of contribution we mean to make to the common good. The mission and purposes are our self-definition. By using them to drive the self-study process, we can enhance our communities and make the process and the product meaningful to the institutions we serve.

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Structuring and Conducting a Self-Study: Achieving Comprehensive Institutional Evaluation

Anne C. Dema
Nina T. Pollard

Overview

The purpose of the session is to facilitate a discussion about how an institution can structure and conduct a self-study process that allows for a comprehensive evaluation resulting in improvements in institutional quality and performance. William Jewell College completed a two-year study (begun in June 1998) that culminated with an on-site visit by an evaluation team in November 2000. The team recommended that accreditation be continued, and that the next comprehensive visit should occur in 2010–11.

Like most institutions involved in this process, William Jewell was challenged to conduct a self-study that ensured

- college-wide participation,
- realistic evaluation of every aspect of the institution,
- identification of patterns of evidence that demonstrate the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation,
- generation of clear and concise report findings, and
- accurate dissemination of information to the various campus constituencies.

Jewell's desired outcomes were to attain continued accreditation and to improve its overall institutional quality and performance.

At the beginning of the self-study process, the above challenges coupled with the desired outcomes seemed overwhelming. As an institution, we wanted to conduct an honest and thorough self-study, yet we were aware of the natural tension associated with using this process to improve the college and at the same time trying to make our case to the North Central Association (NCA) for continued accreditation. The college successfully implemented a self-study structure and evaluation method that allowed us to accomplish the above challenges and to attain the desired outcomes. This paper provides an overview of the self-study process used by the college and the evaluation method implemented by the steering committee to examine the institution in light of the five criteria established by NCA. In the self-study mentoring session, participants will apply the evaluation method to information gathered during the self-study process. It is anticipated that this activity will spark conversation about the benefits and challenges associated with this evaluation method and self-study process.

Profile of the College

William Jewell College is a private, four-year liberal arts college located in Liberty, Missouri, adjacent to the metropolitan community of Kansas City. The college is primarily residential, with a campus of approximately 500 acres. Founded on the western frontier in 1849, William Jewell College's mission is to

- provide students with a liberal arts education of superior quality;
- serve communities beyond the campus educationally, culturally, and socially; and
- be an institution loyal to the ideals of Christ, demonstrating a Christian philosophy for the whole of life, and expressing the Missouri Baptist heritage which is the foundation of the college.

The college is committed to providing an education that liberates and enhances a person's intellectual and spiritual life while at the same time is connected to practical application in work and service. Since 1994, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has classified William Jewell as a "Baccalaureate I" institution. In August 2000, it was reclassified as a "Baccalaureate Colleges-Liberal Arts" institution.

Self-Study Structure

The self-study process began in the summer of 1998 when the President and Provost named a faculty member as the institutional Self-Study Coordinator. The Provost and the Self-Study Coordinator identified a team of faculty and staff representing not only persons with the requisite skills and wisdom, but also the various college subcultures to serve on the steering committee and self-study teams. The steering committee was composed of five faculty members (four tenured and one untenured) and two college staff members. Ex-officio members included the President, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Chair of the Board of Trustees, and the Chair of the Alumni Board of Governors.

In an effort to address NCA's five criteria, to give attention to critical areas of self-scrutiny at Jewell, and to build on the work of strategic planning and other recent initiatives, the self-study efforts were coordinated around four areas. These areas included

- academic programs,
- institutional integrity and values,
- resources management, and
- student development.

The President, upon recommendation of the steering committee, appointed members of the college community to self-study teams focusing on these four areas. Each team consisted of a chairperson, five or six faculty and staff members, one or two members of the steering committee, and pertinent ex-officio members. In addition, a self-study team, the Institutional Data Clearinghouse (IDC), was created to oversee all information needs during the process. The IDC team was responsible for overseeing all research and data management related to the self-study. The impetus for creating this team was to promote efficiency and cooperation and to help avoid redundancy and overtaxing of institutional resources.

The four self-study teams were charged with examining the respective areas of importance and providing evidence that the institution was meeting the General Institutional Requirements and the Criteria for Accreditation as outlined in *The Handbook of Accreditation*. Each self-study team determined the best way to identify information needs, evaluate the collected information, and structure the results of the study into a team report. The self-study team reports contained a description of the process used to conduct the self-study, an identification of institutional strengths and areas needing attention, and an evaluation of the current reality. The steering committee members worked as liaisons with the self-study teams to help coordinate information needs and to provide guidance and encouragement to the team members. Each self-study team was asked to submit both an electronic and a hard copy of their report (and all supporting materials) by June 1, 1999. Every department, office, program, administrator, and trustee member contributed to the self-study process.

Two task forces were also created. One consisted of veteran faculty members who worked during the fall of 1998 examining the 1990-1991 Self-Study Report and the 1990-1991 Visiting Team Report. This group was charged with identifying key issues from these reports for the steering committee. The task force was asked to submit a report by January 1999.

During the summer of 1999, the steering committee also appointed a task force composed of students who were known leaders on campus. The student task force led other student leaders at Encampment in August 1999 in the identification of issues important to students. During the fall, the student task force developed tools for measuring student perceptions on these issues, collected data, and analyzed the results of the study. The task force was asked to submit a report of its work by February 15, 2000.

Steering Committee Efforts

The steering committee met approximately every other week during the 1998–1999 academic year. The focus of its work was to provide updates about the self-study team efforts, identify common information needs, discuss any submitted team reports, and begin developing an outline for the self-study report. The Provost attended the majority of steering committee meetings, and the other ex-officio members were kept informed via distribution of meeting minutes. During the summer of 1999, the steering committee met at three all-day retreats to discuss the progress of the self-study process and to develop a more detailed strategy for the second year of the self-study.

During the 1999–2000 academic year, the steering committee met on a weekly basis for two-hour meetings. By August 1999, all self-study team reports had been submitted. The steering committee focused its efforts on discussing and reviewing recommendations in each report. To ensure a thorough evaluation of the information contained within these reports, the steering committee members used the following questions as a guideline for their discussions:

Descriptive:	Is a complete description of each area provided?
	What resources (catalog, self-study, pamphlets, etc.) describe the program/department?
	Which resources need to be collected for the Resource Center?
Assessment:	What methods of evaluation are used in the program/department?
	What is the relationship between the stated goals and the goals of the institutional strategic plan?
	What evidence does the program have to demonstrate its effectiveness?
	What action(s) is(are) taken when concerns are identified?
Issue-based:	What issues of concern does the report raise?
	What actions have been taken to address the concerns?
	What issues of concern identified by the steering committee are not raised in the report?
	What additional information needs to be collected?
	What actions does the committee think need to be taken?
Next step:	What recommendations should the steering committee make to the administration?

After evaluating all of the self-study team reports using the above questions, the steering committee worked with the college community to collect any new information. This new information was then reevaluated using the same process. By early spring 2000, the steering committee had thoroughly discussed every self-study team and task force report. In April 2000, the steering committee began synthesizing issues of importance from all of these reports and reevaluating the organization of the Self-Study Report.

Self-Study Report

Initially, the steering committee conceptualized that the structure of the Self-Study Report would reflect the structure of the self-study process. We thought the final report would be organized according to issues raised in the areas of academics, institutional integrity and vitality, student development, and resources. Naively we thought the team reports could be put together to generate the final report (with appropriate editing). However, as a result of our evaluation of the individual reports, institutional, not just "area," issues surfaced. We found that issues identified in one self-study team report were often raised in another, and in some instances concerns or points raised in more than report indicated the presence of a more pervasive institutional issue. This reality coupled with the recognition that the final report had two purposes (to attain continued accreditation and to improve overall college quality and performance) and two corresponding audiences (members of the evaluation team and the various constituencies of the college) caused us to revise the organization of the final report.

The Self-Study Report is organized into five parts. The first part (Chapters 1 and 2) provides information about the college's profile and accreditation history and the process used to conduct the current Self-Study Report. The second part (Chapter 3) provides evidence that the college is fulfilling the General Institutional Requirements as identified by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. In the third part (Chapters 4–8), the college provides evidence that it is in compliance with the five Criteria for Accreditation. In these chapters, the college presents information regarding its mission and purpose (Chapter 4), its organization of resources necessary for accomplishing these purposes (Chapter 5), its achievement of the stated educational and other purposes (Chapter 6), its preparedness to maintain these patterns in the future (Chapter 7), and its ability to interact with internal and external constituencies with integrity (Chapter 8). Part four is a summary that articulates Jewell's strengths and challenges as identified during the self-study process (Chapter 9) and the college's request for continued accreditation (Chapter 10). The fifth part contains the Basic Institutional Data forms and other appendix material. Chapter 9, "Learning from the Self-Study," presents issues that emerged during the self-study steering committee's deliberations as a result of reading numerous documents, listening to campus constituencies, analyzing and evaluating data, and participating in extensive conversation. We hoped that the information in this chapter would spark campus conversation as Jewell seeks to progress and develop as an institution.

In the self-study mentoring session, we will discuss the relationship between the outcomes of the self-study process and the Self-Study Report and the articulation of the college's strengths and challenges in more detail. We will also share some of the benefits experienced by the college as a result of the comprehensive evaluation method used during the self-study process.

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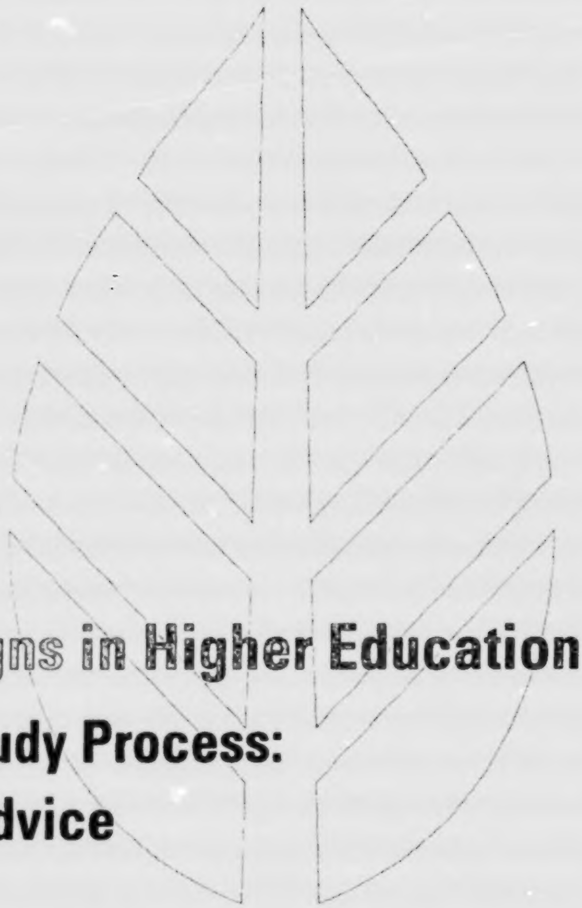

Chapter 15

New Designs in Higher Education

The Self-Study Process: Practical Advice

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Interdependence, Collegiality, and the End of Democracy: An Institutional Strategy for Framing the Self-Study

Richard H. Hanson
Sally C. Crisp

Interdependence

The self-study process was approached as an opportunity to reinforce the collegial culture of this university and also to raise awareness of the university's mission. The university has a long history of participatory democracy by faculty and staff in its affairs. Faculty and staff, many of whom were hired during the formative years of the university, created the system of governance and started engaging the university's communities in ways that advance the university's unique mission. Interdependence among units, a minor issue in the two previous NCA self-studies, was developed into the central theme for this self-study.

Units within the university have developed their own missions and programs that support the more encompassing mission of the university. Therein lay the challenge. These units, working their part of the larger whole, may have become unaware of their connectivity to and dependence on other units within the university.

Prior to and during the early stages of the period when subcommittees were performing their assigned duties for the self-study, the entire university, faculty and staff, participated in two data-gathering exercises to identify and measure the strength of interdependent working relationships among units. By making this the premier universal activity for the campus while organizing for the self-study, the message was sent that interdependence among units would be examined. The results of this data-gathering activity were summarized into a report that became a primary source of data for the subcommittees. More detail about this process is given at the end of this paper.

Collegiality

The self-study coordinator and university provost initially agreed how the report was to be organized and which developments and issues were going to receive special attention. This top-down decision on how to frame the presentation of the report helped the members of the 17 issue-focused committees and the eight college/school deans concentrate on their responsibility to write their reports.

Invitations to participate in the self-study process or to nominate colleagues to do so were sent from the provost to all members of the faculty, key members of the staff, and student leaders. The self-study coordinator and provost selected subcommittee leaders and identified and placed most of the members who ultimately served on the committees. Ninety-three faculty, staff, and students participated in the work of the subcommittees.

Subcommittee reports were submitted to the self-study coordinator approximately 10 weeks after the beginning of this phase of the process. This corresponded to the end of the spring semester, giving the self-study coordinator the summer to evaluate the reports and prepare them for the next stage in the process. After consulting with knowledgeable campus leaders, it was determined that some of the reports were insufficient. For example, when a strong personality was a subcommittee chair who was responsible for writing the report, it appeared that neither data nor counsel of their subcommittee members influenced what was written. A couple of subcommittees were unable to report anything.

The 15-member self-study task force, a carefully selected group of faculty, staff, and students, received 25 separate reports shortly after the start of fall semester. Its work was finished by the end of November.

The End of Democracy

Convening the self-study task force, the highest level of collegial review in the process, signaled the end of democracy. The many voices in the subcommittee reports had to be melded into a single university voice.

The task force began having success assembling the final report only after it developed consensus about what to say and how to say it. Paper versions of the 25 reports from the subcommittees and deans stacked up nearly 10 inches high. Expressed very succinctly, the task force agreed it had to "tell the story." The story was that "the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) is Arkansas' only metropolitan university, and that UALR is meeting its mission objectives, and has the resources and organization to continue to meet its objectives." It was at this stage in the process that a professional writer and a professional layout artist joined the self-study process.

Some of the subcommittee reports were still problematic even during this late stage in the process, and for different reasons. Strong personal biases marked some of the reports. Other subcommittee reports were primarily descriptive boilerplate text. Some reports failed to grasp the complexity of their issues. The task force, understanding it had to tell the story, reconstructed these reports. The exception was for the eight chapters written by college and school deans. The task force felt that it was important that these chapters contain more of a personal feel to them.

While the task force created the message for the story, it was the professional writer who created the tone and institutional voice for the story. Working in concert with the professional layout artist, the writer found ways to clearly and efficiently communicate major points to the readers.

Knowing from the beginning that the report would say that the task force believed the university is meeting its mission objectives and can continue to do so did not prevent the task force from preparing frank discussions of situations that were problematic. There is one notable example of how the self-study process helped the administration address a longstanding problem. For the greater part of the decade, in spite of corrective actions, a very important service office had been unable to provide the quality and breadth of service to the university community that could be expected. At every level of the self-study, starting with the data-gathering survey described above, this was identified as a major concern of faculty and staff. Even before the final report was assembled, the administration took a major corrective action. The service office staff and its functions were moved within the administrative structure. The staff was placed under the supervision of another office. The expanded office was directed to develop a one-stop service philosophy for its clients.

The task force prepared an analysis of why, for the first time in its history, the university experienced a major decline in its enrollment in spite of all of the resources and advantages it had to continue its heretofore-steady growth in enrollment. Resolution of that situation is in a longer time frame, and the issue is being addressed.

Energizing the Campus

The process of measuring the degrees of interdependence among units on the campus raised awareness of how units could develop "silo vision" while still meeting their units' mission goals and objectives. Forced interaction between leaders of 67 campus units created new dialog that continued for months. The exercise described below could be repeated on a regular schedule, with the expectation that the understanding and appreciation of the complex workings of the university would lead to a stronger infrastructure.

The design of the activity to engage the university community, faculty and staff, originated from the mid-level of academic administration, the Deans Council. Two different data-gathering exercises were developed. Paper copies of the survey instruments are available.

First, a survey was prepared for all faculty, administrators, and appropriate staff members that collected information on these issues:

1. Rate your department's degree of responsibility for the following elements of UALR's mission.

   Using a scale of 1-5, faculty responded to the 17 separate parts in the university's mission statement.

2. Rate these attributes in terms of how well they advance the department's mission.

   Using a scale of 1-5, faculty responded to how well 10 identified departmental attributes advance the missions of the department, college/school, or the university.

3. Identify the departments where interdependent working relationships exist with your department.

   All 38 academic units and 29 nonacademic service units were listed. Respondents were asked to identify the unit that employed them, to list the three units on campus most dependent upon their unit, and then the three units that their employing unit is most dependent upon.

4. Rate the degree of interaction your department has with institutions and organizations external to the university.

   The degree of interaction was measured on a scale of 1-5.

5. Comment briefly on the following questions.

Respondents were asked to identify their unit's unique contribution to advancing the university's mission, and also to identify units with which their employing unit needs to create better interdependent relationships in order to advance the university's mission.

A second strategy to raise the awareness of interdependence was designed. Unit heads from all academic and service units were randomly paired. They were asked to meet, discuss the questions listed below, and then submit a written report to the self-study coordinator. Not even the campus' chief executive officer was immune from reporting.

1. Identify the current goals of your unit.
2. Which type of working arrangement, interdependent or dependent, best advances these goals?
3. How well is your unit achieving its goals?
4. List campus units that are absolutely dependent upon your unit to advance their goals.
5. Describe three examples where an appreciation of interdependence between your unit and other units helped advance your unit's goals.
6. Describe three examples where insufficient appreciation of interdependence prevented your unit from meeting its goals. Describe what was done to impress upon the other unit how dependent your unit is on the other unit.

As mentioned above, so many responders identified one service office in their responses to question number 6 that the office was merged with another and put under different leadership before the team visited the university.

The second activity was done during the period of time when the 17 subcommittees were writing their reports.

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Table 1. University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Representative Questions and the Responses Regarding Missions and Interconnectivity on the Survey Administered to the Faculty and Some Members of the Staff

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Faculty and staff recorded their response on a scale of 1-5.

1 = Little or none **5 = Great** **NA = Not applicable**

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1. Rate your department's degree of responsibility for the following element of UALR's Mission.

Example of a Shared Value

To develop student intellect.

Professional Studies	4.72
Science and Engineering	4.72
Law	4.67
Education	4.64
Arts and Humanities	4.58
Business	4.57

Example of Item Validity

To serve/strengthen society by enhancing awareness in scientific arenas.

Science and Engineering	4.43
Professional Studies	3.33
Education	3.16
Business	2.70
Arts and Humanities	2.37
Law	1.39

Example of College Differences

To promote humane sensitivities.

Education	4.52
Law	4.50
Professional Studies	4.47
Arts and Humanities	4.45
Science and Engineering	3.31
Business	2.70

2. Rate these attributes in terms of how well they advance the department's mission.

Example of Incongruity

My academic research and creative endeavors advance the department's mission.

Law	4.50
Professional Studies	4.19
Arts and Humanities	4.18
Science and Engineering	3.91
Education	3.72
Business	3.48

3. Identify the departments where interdependent working relationships exist with your department.

4. Rate the degree of interaction your department has with institutions and organizations external to the university.

Example of a Talking Point

What degree of interaction does your department have with pre- K-2 public/private schools?

Education	3.20
Arts and Humanities	3.07
Science and Engineering	3.06
Professional Studies	2.19
Business	1.35
Law	1.33

How Do You Spell Self-Study Relief? R-O-L-A-I-D-S! One Dose Will Last for Up to Ten Years

John Loucks
Marilyn Ewing
Juneil McQueen
Ann Judd

Despite the positive benefits of a self-study, the process adds stress to the work environment. The project is difficult and must be accomplished while administrators, faculty, and staff are fulfilling the responsibilities of an already demanding workload. At Seward County Community College (SCCC), we took these negatives into account while still in the planning stages. From the inception of the process in October 1997 to its completion in March 2000, we purposefully accentuated the positive by emphasizing that the self-study gave our campus community the opportunity to celebrate the advances of the previous ten years. Maintaining the celebratory attitude through committee meetings, missed deadlines, corrupted computer files, and the unexpected departure of key committee members was sometimes difficult, but the steering committee managed to diffuse the stress with humor, excellent planning, and social "breathers." As with all medication, we discovered that our efforts had the unintended side effect of improving morale across the campus.

Our Self-Study Coordinators, the editor, and the resource room coordinator worked to alleviate stress by following the steps alluded to in the titular acronym. Each of these persons will relate his or her role in each step.

☐ **Recruit**

It's very important to recruit coordinators who have the respect of the campus and the organizational skills to keep the process on track. The coordinators must also be mediators, peacekeepers, motivators, and friends. The editor should be someone who will stay on task and avoid becoming too attached to the words she/he has written. The resource room coordinator should be an excellent organizer and be willing to be the data keeper to ensure conservation of the patterns of evidence. Those recruited for this position must not be door-slammers, foot-stompers, or voice-raisers; the key characteristic they must possess is patience, which will be continually tested throughout the process.

☐ **Organize**

Our care in developing a two-and-one-half year plan kept the committees on track despite the various calamities that inevitably occur in long-term projects. Included in the discussion of organization, however, will be the warning that the finalized self-study rarely follows the original plan. The report will likely be organized more in accordance with the information gathered than with the original outline. Steering committee members must be flexible and resourceful enough to reorganize when conditions require it–and to smile all the while.

Of course, the process must be organized with timetables and due dates. Time must be allowed for steering committee members to familiarize themselves with the requirements of the report. Subcommittee chairs should be chosen with regard to their reputations for diligence. Handouts will include a narration of the process used to appoint subcommittee chairs and key organizational materials used to manage the project.

The team visit requires another round of organization. Our resource room chair organized the resource room by anticipating the needs of the team, from aesthetics to rapid access to documentation. She will provide a narration of the steps she took to accomplish her goals, as well as a diagram of the room's arrangement. We will also discuss the special accommodations we provided for the team to make each member feel welcome.

☐ **Laugh**

At SCCC, steering committee members were given their assignments at a dinner meeting. One of the coordinators cleverly gave each member his/her charge using the words of the tape-recorded voice in Mission Impossible. Clever treats were brought to each steering committee meeting. To assure careful reading, the editor included humorous text in the pages she submitted for approval by the steering committee (the humor was very carefully deleted after printing the draft to avoid inadvertent inclusion in the final report). The handout will include some of these passages.

☐ **Appreciate**

All steering committee members remained positive during the process, purposefully accepting the subcommittee reports with applause and thanks. Though many reports needed more work upon first submission, steering committee members asked for those changes in private. Many subcommittee members were classified staff terrified of writing, so the editor empowered them by reminding them of their expertise and the special point of view that their role on campus afforded them. She emphasized that the writing was her job and that she would not judge others by their writing skills as long as they did not make fun of her for her housekeeping or typing skills. Although some of the reports were more descriptive than evaluative, they provided the information necessary to draw important conclusions about the criterion being covered. A caution should be noted here: Do not provide subcommittees with too many self-studies as examples. The editor caught some items taken word for word from self-studies kept in our library for subcommittee use. We must remember that some staff members may be unaware of the definition of plagiarism.

One important means of showing appreciation for the hard work of the entire staff was a special convocation held to award each committee member with a copy of the Self-Study Report. Each committee was called to the stage en masse; then the president and the Self-Study Coordinators thanked each committee member individually. Gifts were presented to the editor and the coordinators at all-staff meetings. The most effective signs of appreciation, however, were literal pats on the back and kind words.

☐ **Individualize**

Although representatives of most colleges pick up copies of successful reports at the NCA Annual Meeting, they should be used only as guides. Each institution has its own history and emphases, and these unique elements should guide the writing of the report. In our Self-Study Report, we introduce chapters with college legends or a discussion of a quality or event unique to our institution, lending individuality and interest to the report. In addition, the organization of the report was different from any we viewed. For instance, it was more logical for us to include assessment in two chapters, keeping it close to its relevant usage, rather than making assessment its own chapter. We encourage others to take this organic view of organization. Our chapter division pages contained testimonials from and pictures of our students. These and other creative approaches generated needed energy and enthusiasm when the enormity of the process was most daunting.

☐ **Delegate**

Delegation does not end with the appointment of committees. There are times when steering committee members can be overwhelmed with immediate responsibilities, and it is important that the collegiality of the steering committee is established enough that a member can yell "Help!" when in fear of drowning. All members of the committee should be sensitive to the possibility that one person may be overloaded and offer that help even if it is not requested. Finally, the key to delegation is to trust those to whom one delegates; otherwise, no aid can be given.

☐ **Soirée**

We don't want to break parallelism with the end of our acronym, so we ask our readers to think of soirée as a verb, despite the likely objection of lexicographers. We celebrated early and often during the self-study process, beginning with a dinner at the local country club for newly-appointed steering committee members, and ending with a food fest following the visiting team's departure. Because each steering committee member attended the NCA Annual Meeting at least once, celebrations included gourmet dining in Chicago, especially memorable for those of us who rarely have the opportunity to leave the Liberal, Kansas, city limits, where our options are limited to greasy spoons. A complete description of our celebrations will be included in the handout.

Committee members will share advice during the last portion of the presentation, most of which comes from the clarity of hindsight. Although we are proud of the outcome of the NCA accreditation process, we know that we should have spent more time preparing our students for the visit. Among the topics we will discuss is the unfortunate result of not having clearly defined the word *assessment* to our students in preparation for the visit. We will discuss the time that can be wasted worrying about capitalization and pronoun use. We will exhibit the result of a faulty printing job and propose steps to take to avoid last minute jitters, but these setbacks and quandaries are nothing that a little ROLAIDS won't cure.

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Envision Your NCA Visit: How Little Things Mean a Lot

M. Joanne Rathburn
Lori Weyers
H. Jeffrey Rafn

Envisioning or picturing in your mind your NCA visit helps in setting goals for the process. Research, brainstorming, and mapping your ideas on paper gets the process started. To meet your goals, you need an overall plan and a focus on details. Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) in Green Bay, Wisconsin, followed such a process to achieve a very successful event in October 2000. In this paper, NWTC will share some of its planning, writing, communicating, studying, visualizing, recognizing, and celebrating.

NWTC is a two-year technical college in the Wisconsin Technical College System. The College has a main campus in Green Bay, and other campuses in Marinette and Sturgeon Bay.

Planning

The Planning Committee consisting of the college president, administrators, management, and faculty set the pace for the process. This committee:

- Established the manner in which the report would integrate with and support other college initiatives
- Set timelines
- Outlined the process to include as many members of the college as possible
- Decided on the organization of the report and produced the preplan
- Selected the Steering Team from a list of volunteers
- Approved a training process and release time for the Steering Team
- Reviewed the recommendations from the previous visit
- Contracted for a college-wide climate study
- Discussed the issues that were anticipated as current concerns.

Writing

The Steering Team representing faculty, administration, management, and support staff led the research process under the leadership of a faculty coordinator. The Steering Team:

- Attended a workshop presented by co-chairs of a successful NCA visit at Fox Valley Technical College
- Selected an area of responsibility for research
- Recruited college personnel to join in the research
- Studied the NCA *Handbook*
- Wrote questions to be answered based on NCA criteria
- Researched answers to the questions, collected resources, and wrote a draft of a chapter for the report
- Reviewed the drafts from each research team
- Evaluated the information and listed strengths, opportunities for improvement, and activities in progress.

The coordinator, a faculty member, was responsible for the overall progress and:

- Served as a liaison between the Planning Committee and the Steering Team
- Facilitated the weekly meetings of the Steering Team
- Revised the chapter drafts
- Compiled the final report
- Communicated the progress to all members of the college
- Planned the Resource Room
- Served as a contact with the visiting NCA team.

Communicating

Communication with all college personnel was a priority in the overall plan. These steps were taken to keep everyone informed:

- Wrote articles in college publications
- Sent letters and memos to each member of the college, including advisory committee members and adjunct faculty
- Held focus meeting with students
- Sent memos to all students, which were distributed by faculty in classes
- Displayed posters throughout all campuses
- Visited all campuses to meet with faculty and staff
- Presented updates to divisions or departments at meetings throughout the process
- Reported on progress at all-college inservices during the process
- Sent copies of Executive Summary to everyone
- Sent email to everyone
- Displayed announcements on TV monitors
- Sent weekly updates to everyone during the month preceding the visit
- Planned celebration activities for each all-college inservice
- Presented information at Board of Trustees' meetings.

Studying

Of course, the teams researched NWTC thoroughly. In addition, the teams:

- Studied the NCA *Handbook*
- Read reports from many other colleges
- Attended state conferences
- Attended the NCA Annual Meeting
- Spoke with others who had completed the visit or were in planning stages
- Questioned NCA evaluators
- Contacted the NCA liaison.

Visualizing

Visualizing was an important activity in the preparation for NCA. Team members visualized the format of the report in an initial step. The Resource Room team visualized the organization of the room, the order of the resources, and the amenities for the visit long before the visit occurred. (The coordinator even visualized the happy report-out session!)

Recognizing

Everyone worked hard and put in many extra hours. Recognizing those efforts was a goal. The following list of activities includes different kinds of recognition:

- Introducing Steering Team members at an inservice
- Publishing the names of all teams in the college newsletter
- Posting the names of all team members on a major bulletin board for the duration of the process
- Presenting special college mugs to all team members
- Sending bookmarks to everyone as a reminder of the dates of the visit
- Sending copies of the complete Self-Study Report to all who requested them
- Paying for team members to attend NCA Annual Meetings.

Celebrating

The Planning Team wanted this process to excite, energize, and motivate the college for continued performance. The theme, "NWTC Celebrates Learning with NCA," set the tone for the whole process. The teams emphasized learning and celebrating what we do through community, cooperation, and camaraderie. Some fun activities were:

- Sing-a-long to introduce NCA to everyone at an all-college inservice (verses from popular songs were rewritten for our purposes)
- Notepads with the message "NWTC Celebrates NCA in 2000-01" given to everyone
- Job Fair to introduce personnel to the different teams
- Special edition newspaper with "Help Wanted" ads to interest volunteers
- NCA Challenge, with a game show format and competing teams answering questions about NCA and NWTC (everyone in the audience received the questions and the answers!)
- Prizes awarded to participants in all events
- Ice cream social to work on assessment project
- An all-college party funded by the bargaining units and the college after the visit.

Conclusion

In summary, many little and not-so-little efforts led to NWTC's continued accreditation with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years. The efforts that stand out in reflecting on the whole process are these:

- The support and active involvement of the administration and the Board
- The active involvement of faculty and staff
- The special attention given to the concerns from the previous review
- The additional chapter in the Self-Study Report that summarized the evaluation process
- The continual effort of communicating the events to everyone
- The fun and enthusiasm everyone had.

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Why the NCA Accreditation Process Facilitates Strategic Visioning: When NCA Comes, It's Too Late to Phone a Friend

John A. Ludrick
Leslie D. Crall

Introduction

This session explores the process of going through a special emphasis self-study step by step. Southwestern Oklahoma State University utilized the self-study process to engage in strategic visioning. Southwestern, like many universities, faces major impact from technological and political-economic influences. These influences exist externally as well as internally. Changing demographics, fluctuating enrollments, uncertain funding levels, and information-age technology affect all major aspects of the institution. Southwestern needs to be in a position to do more than simply cope with these impacts. It must enable itself to use these influences to its advantage. Good decisions based on sound data analyses will result in Southwestern Oklahoma State University's becoming an even stronger and more progressive institution in the future.

Strategic Visioning

The session will provide insights into the joys and tribulations of developing our strategic visioning plan, the "Agenda for Excellence." This publication characterizes a plan for the university for five years into the future as the major goals we will strive to achieve. These goals, as developed by a large group of internal and external stakeholders, reflect the driving forces and comparative advantages of Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Examples of the Strategic Goals and Initiatives are:

By 2003: Southwestern will be serving 5500 students and will have advanced its position as one of the premier universities in Oklahoma with an emphasis on quality education. (Current enrollment of Southwestern is 4915.)

By 2001: The university will have an effective marketing plan that promotes greater exposure of its departments and programs.

By 2001: The university will have enhanced the effective and efficient management of its resources.

By 2003: The university will have established cooperative arrangements to enhance its mission of teaching, scholarly activity, public service, and economic development.

By 2005: The assets of the Southwestern Oklahoma State University Foundation will have increased to $10 million. (Currently the balance is approximately $6.5 million.)

The Self-Study

Planning and goal-setting permeate various levels of most institutions; rarely does the process become all encompassing so as to achieve a cohesive unit that involves the entire university. The NCA accreditation process, especially the special emphasis type of self-study, does afford just such an opportunity. While faculty members may be very adept with the strengths and problems of their individual units, seldom are they asked to undertake the visioning involved with NCA accreditation for an entire university. An essential strength is that individuals who work with the NCA process focus on a university level rather than at a departmental level.

The Process

When Southwestern embarked on the NCA accreditation process and the steering committee was formed, one common goal was determined: "coming up with a strategic vision for Southwestern Oklahoma State University that would drive the institution into the future." The steering committee wanted to provide administrators, faculty, students, and other stakeholders with a comprehensive agenda that would build on the strengths that currently existed within the university. It was determined that the end product would be a document that would not just sit on someone's bookshelf but that rather would have a significant impact on the future of the institution. The steering committee was committed to the future of the university and the visioning efforts. Also paramount was a desire to look for opportunities on which the university could capitalize. A natural part of the process was to try to identify and address potential problems or concerns that might exist.

The rationale for this presentation is to share with others the sequence that the university went through over a three-year period during the NCA accreditation process. The hope is that some insight will be extended into the potential rewards of such a process as well as point out some of the potential pitfalls encountered and that others are likely to encounter. The presenters will emphasize the ability to utilize the accreditation process for institutional improvement and excellence.

Institutions that are on the verge of embarking on the self-study process, especially those that are contemplating using strategic visioning for their type of special emphasis self-study, will benefit by attending the presentation. Forward-thinking institutions that want to achieve objectives through the more efficient utilization of their limited resources, that are currently engaged in this type of self-study, and that are in the final stages prior to the evaluator's visit can benefit from this presentation. Activities and tasks will be highlighted from a practical standpoint.

The Steps in the Process

The presentation is a comprehensive, in-depth look at the planning process recently completed at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. This will be accomplished through a PowerPoint slide presentation that will show the timelines and tasks involved in arriving at and subsequently implementing the "Agenda for Excellence." This process involved all levels of the university, including students, faculty, administrators, and other university stakeholders. The broad categorical outline of the Southwestern Oklahoma State University plan is as follows:

1. Data collecting
2. Data assimilation
3. Developing merged scenarios
4. Consensus-building
5. Writing the self-study
6. Getting reaccreditation
7. Implementing initiatives for goal achievement

The president of the university formed a Planning and Resource Council to serve as an oversight committee throughout the process. The Council was also charged with giving advice. Next, scan teams were formed to research the perceptions of internal and external stakeholders and individual values that the university holds dear. Internal stakeholders consisted of students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The external scan team looked at perceptions of parents, employers, government officials, alumni, and friends of the university. The values scan team made an effort to gain insight into the values that people considered important within the university. These results helped determine what were perceived to be the university's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Once these data were compiled, the scan teams wrote reports of their findings.

The university then conducted a massive two-day meeting that was attended by students, faculty, administrators, and community stakeholders. The purpose of this meeting was to identify the goals for the university. We were advised to keep the list of goals very specific and small in number. Ten goals were initially identified and they were narrowed down to five from which the "Agenda for Excellence" was crafted. Action teams were then formed with faculty, staff, administration, and student representatives. Each action team was charged with drafting plans to achieve each of these goals. The action teams identified persons with primary responsibility for implementing the various actions and produced timelines for achievement. The university is currently engaged in this process.

The members of the NCA steering committee were involved at all phases of the aforementioned visioning process. Each member chaired a work team to research and write the Self-Study Report and address the different criteria for accreditation. The final document contains the results of the visioning process and the reports from the various action teams on how to achieve the goals.

Conclusion

This session focuses on our recent self-study experience that began in the fall of 1997 and culminated with the site visit in October 2000. The strategic visioning engaged in by the university and the process of the NCA self-study greatly benefited Southwestern Oklahoma State University. The conclusion is founded on the university's establishing goals for the future. It made it possible to address change, examine ourselves to find our comparative advantages, and identify driving forces that we expect will shape our future.

We want to share our experiences with those university representatives who are presently in any phase of the accrediting process. Participants will be actively engaged in the presentation through the utilization of a discussion and question-type format.

Strategic visioning is vital in higher education as universities and colleges fight ever-increasing battles for funding and the public demands greater accountability for the use of their tax dollars. In a rapidly changing environment, the NCA accreditation process, specifically the special emphasis self-study, allows us to have dynamic flexibility to adapt and change to meet demands

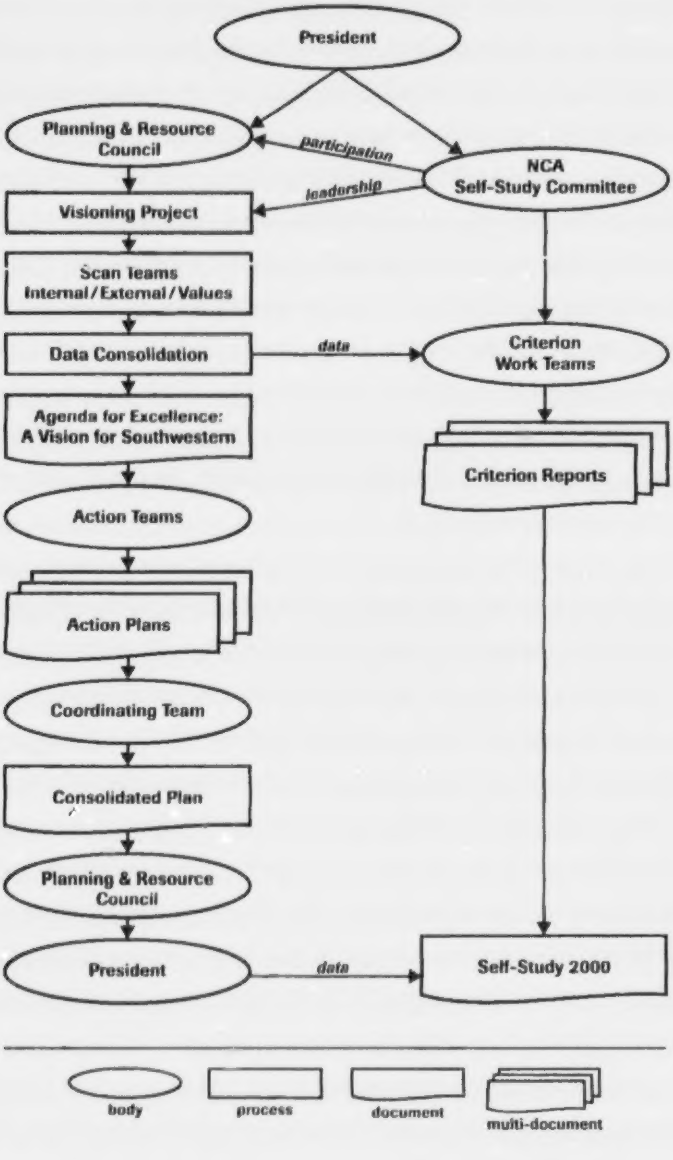
During the session, the presenters will reveal a chronological sequence that will emphasize the vigorous planning and dedication of everyone involved in order to accomplish the examination of the present status of the university.

John A. Ludrick is a Professor and Assistant to the Dean in the School of Education at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

Leslie D. Crall is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Business Administration Department in the School of Business at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

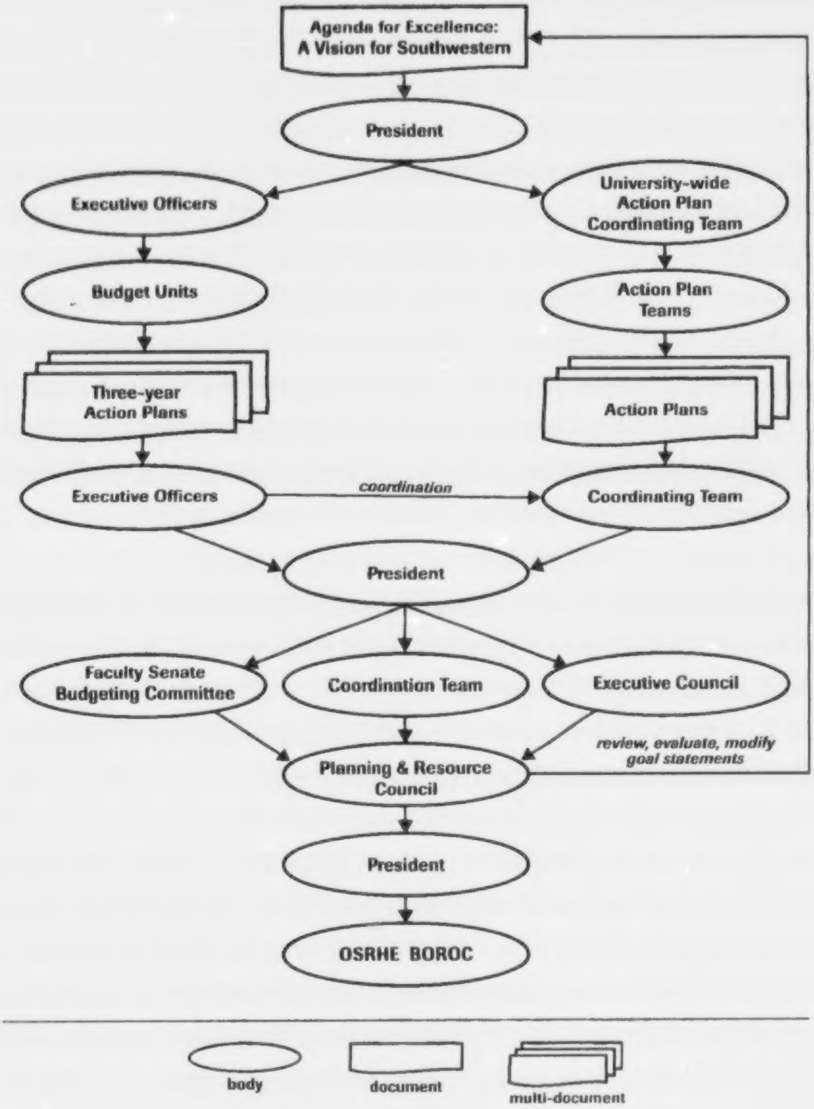
Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Figure 1. Initial Planning Process


President
Planning & Resource Council
participation
leadership
NCA Self-Study Committee
Visioning Project
Scan Teams Internal / External / Values
Data Consolidation
data
Criterion Work Teams
Agenda for Excellence: A Vision for Southwestern
Criterion Reports
Action Teams
Action Plans
Coordinating Team
Consolidated Plan
Planning & Resource Council
President
data
Self-Study 2000
body
process
document
multi-document

Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Figure 2. Annual Planning Process


Agenda for Excellence: A Vision for Southwestern
President
Executive Officers
University-wide Action Plan Coordinating Team
Budget Units
Action Plan Teams
Three-year Action Plans
Action Plans
Executive Officers
coordination
Coordinating Team
President
Faculty Senate Budgeting Committee
Coordination Team
Executive Council
review, evaluate, modify goal statements
Planning & Resource Council
President
OSRHE BOROC
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document
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Centralized Data Collection: A Strategy for Building a Data-Rich Resource Room in a Data-Poor Institution

Liz Donnelly
Lloyd Musselman

Institutional Overview and Context

Oklahoma City University is a private, comprehensive, United Methodist-related university offering nationally acclaimed programs in dance, law, and music; one of four youth ministry programs in the country; and the only international business degree program in Oklahoma. OCU ranks among the nation's best universities in *The National College Review Guide, U.S. News and World Report, The Student Guide to America's Best 100 College Buys* and *America's Best Christian Colleges.* OCU students receive practical, broad-based education, coupled with an emphasis on their ethical and religious potential, in an environment structured to maintain the United Methodist tradition of education without indoctrination. The student/faculty ratio is 14:1, the best in Oklahoma.

OCU boasts a highly diverse student population, with students from 48 states and more than 60 countries. Approximately 2000 of the 4000 enrolled are undergraduates. Academic programs are offered by the Petree College of Arts and Sciences, Meinders School of Business, School of American Dance and Arts Management, School of Music, Kramer School of Nursing, Wimberly School of Religion and Graduate Theological Center, and the School of Law. The campus is located in the heart of Oklahoma City, offering students a wide range of services and cultural opportunities.

The current president, Dr. Stephen Jennings, began his service to the university in 1998. Under his leadership, the institution has focused on quality-improvement initiatives through data-driven decision making. This direction has led the campus to critically evaluate all aspects of its information management systems. The desired outcomes of these efforts are to improve services to students and the quality and consistency of institutional data and information.

Integrating Data-Driven Management with the Self-Study

In August of 1999, Oklahoma City University began the process of developing a plan for implementing a self-study in preparation for a North Central Association visit in February 2002. Inherent to this process is the collection of information, resources, and data from variety of administrative units for the purpose of evaluating the programs and services offered at OCU. The Steering Committee quickly recognized that the collection of institutional data and informational resources posed a significant challenge because many of the administrative and academic units did not and do not systematically collect and analyze data as a matter of practice.

Nevertheless, it was recognized that the self-study process presented an opportunity to move the campus away from underutilizing data and resources to a more data-rich culture. The looming North Central visit required us to build and organize a core of historical data, and identify data "holes" where essential missing data could be mined. This effort produced a comprehensive list of institutional resources and a central location where stored data are accessible to all members of the Self-Study Steering Committee. The Steering Committee determined that the collected data must not only assist in researching the self-study, but must also be instrumental in systematically maintaining up-to-date data and information long after the completion of the NCA visit. This information must be instrumental in future long-range strategic planning initiatives and data collection efforts.

Issues and Problems

Many issues emerged in the process of determining just how to collect and store the necessary data. The first concerned enhancing the consistency and reliability of data in existence at the time of the initiation of the self-study planning. The data reported internally and externally were often inconsistent, varying according to the reporting administrative unit. For example, the freshman retention rate was reported in several different ways due to the absence of a shared definition of what precisely comprised the cohort of students to be measured.

Another issued involved the low level of willingness of several administrative units to provide data to institutional members outside their area. This issue was compounded by a variety of factors. Many administrators were hesitant to provide data due to a lack of confidence in the accuracy of the data and lack of understanding of how to collect, analyze, and present data. The situation was exacerbated by the lack of administrative time and resources many units allotted to the systematic collection of data in each administrative unit. Data collection for the purpose of data-driven decision making was not a priority in many units because it was not associated with institutional rewards or consequences. In addition, limited human resources, inadequate training in information systems, and scarce fiscal resources lowered the priority that units gave to collecting and reporting data.

Given these issues, the Steering Committee was sensitive to the need for a palatable, cost-effective, low-threat method of institution-wide data collection. Therefore, the Steering Committee devised a protocol of centralized data collection. The organizing body of this initiative was called the Data Collection Team and served as a subcommittee of the Steering Committee. Members of the Data Collection Team included the Director of Information Technology, Director of Institutional Research, Director of Overseas Programs, and Vice President of Student Development.

The Process of Centralized Data Collection

A brief word about the organizational structure of the Steering Committee is appropriate. The Steering Committee included five subgroups called Criterion Teams, each responsible for one of the five Criteria for Accreditation. One of the first tasks assigned to the Criterion Teams was to identify the data each believed would be needed to begin working on their portion of the self-study and to submit requests for data to the Data Collection Team.

Each Criterion Team developed a wish list of data, reports, and documents they anticipated would be useful in researching and writing their portion of the self-study. The data collection protocol incorporated a review of all requests for data by members of the Data Collection Team. The Director of Institutional Research managed the flow of requests and the data subsequently received. This strategy served as a type of triage, consolidating two or more similar requests for data into one and funneling requests to the person on campus most likely to have access to the data requested. This process prevented one person on campus from receiving multiple requests for similar data and from receiving requests for data for which they were not responsible.

As the Criterion Teams progressed through the self-study process, new data needs emerged and were forwarded to the Data Collection Team. The Data Collection Team continuously evaluated and distributed the data requests in an organized fashion.

Triaging requests narrowed the collection of data, reducing workloads and creating a tight, consistent corpus of data to be incorporated into the Self-Study Report. Senior officers were willing to cooperate because they were confident that requests had been subjected to a prescreening process and were legitimate. A member of the library staff cataloged the data entering the Resource Room, maintaining an accurate and up-to-date record of the holdings. The updated list of resources was regularly emailed to members of the Steering Committee.

The mass of collected data and information will essentially make up the contents of the Resource Room. At the time of this writing, Oklahoma City University is in the middle of its self-study process. Criterion Teams are submitting the first draft of their reports to the Steering Committee. Inherent in the process of reviewing the submitted draft will be suggestions to the Criterion Teams from the Steering Committee for supplemental data to strengthen the reports and support the recommendations made in the reports. Supplemental data gathered by the Criterion Teams will be forwarded to the Data Collection team to be cataloged and included in the Resource Room, either as hard copy or as a list of resources and their location.

Lessons Learned

Several obstacles emerged in implementing this process. The Data Collection Team quickly learned that requests for data had to be extremely clear and comprehensive. Written requests were often followed by a telephone call from a member of the Data Collection Team to ensure that the request was understood. Requests for data should include a detailed explanation of the data collected, the number of years back the provided data should include, and the format for the data.

After a period of trial and error, requests for data included due dates. It was very helpful to forward an email reminding providers of the data of the impending due date about one week prior to the due date. Telephone contacts were made to inquire about data requests not received by the due date.

Timing due dates for returning data was tricky. The Data Collection team was sensitive to the need to provide data providers a reasonable span of time to submit data; however, lengthy due dates would unnecessarily prolong the process and prevent the Criterion Teams from moving forward on their work. Each data request was analyzed as to the availability of the data requested and the workload of the office or person to whom the request was made at that time in the academic calendar. Turnaround times that were too short irritated data providers and eroded the credibility of the process.

Handling and organizing data requests was very time-consuming. The person or persons assigned to this task require clerical support and should have good computer skills. In our case, the Director of Institutional Research maintained records of requests, including when the request was made and when it was due, on an Excel spreadsheet. This proved useful, but it did require more time than the Data Collection Team originally anticipated.

Post Self-Study

Upon completion of the self-study process, the Resource Room will be provided a yet to-be-named permanent home. It will be the responsibility of the Office of Institutional Research to annually update and supplement the holdings and forward appropriate items to university archives. The mass of data will be useful for future strategic planning initiatives and institutional research projects.

Conclusion

This strategy has strong possibilities for institutional improvement. This collection of data will serve as the basis and guide for future data collection and will provide historical context for strategic planning. Through all of this, the Steering Committee hopes to alter the culture of the campus by making data-driven decisions reflexive rather than unusual or even agonizing. In addition, the comprehensive list of available data will facilitate future data-collection efforts, providing records for year-to-year comparisons of institutional information such as enrollment trends and data necessary for evaluating and assessing quality-improvement initiatives.

Liz Donnelly is the Director of Student Academic Support Programs at Oklahoma City University.

Lloyd Musselman is Professor of History and Chair of the North Central Association Self-Study for Oklahoma City University.

Electronic Data Gathering in the Preparation of the Self-Study

Brenda LeMaster
Lawrence Johnson

The University of Cincinnati (UC) went through reaccreditation in the spring of 1999. A self-study steering committee was appointed in January 1997, and a decision was made soon after to pursue the special emphasis option for our self-study. It was the intent of the institution to use the reaccreditation process as a way to measure the effectiveness of ongoing institutional priorities in the areas of pedagogy, research, globalization, interdisciplinarity, and technology.

One of our first challenges was from the staff at NCA, who felt that five special emphases were too many, and we needed to find a way to narrow our focus. After much discussion we selected pedagogy and research as our special emphases, with the understanding that we would look at each of these areas through the lens of globalization, interdisciplinarity, and technology. This proposal was accepted by the NCA.

UC is a large, complex institution with multiple missions. Our sixteen colleges include an open access college on the main campus, a medical school, and a music conservatory. Over the years, our colleges developed cultures of autonomy that resulted in many internal barriers to institutionally driven initiatives. A very successful, centrally administered faculty development program, along with support for several pedagogical initiatives over the past several years, had begun to erode some of those barriers. However, preparation for the self-study required that we find a way to obtain active participation from all of our academic and administrative units.

In this session, we will discuss the steps we took to organize the work of the self-study, including hiring an internal consultant to oversee the process. One of the most effective aspects of our process was the development of templates for collection of data. We will discuss the development and use of the templates, which we feel are useful tools regardless of the size of your institution. The following is the template for our special emphases.

NCA Special Emphases Template

Directions

Please provide on a disk short narrative statements that adequately supply the information requested below. The information you submit will be integrated into the Self-Study Report for the University.

a) Enter your response after each sub-heading as indicated.

b) Supporting materials and documents for narrative statements should be included in the appendices. Please label supporting materials/documents with the sub-heading to which they are related (example: IB2: Interfacing Technology and Pedagogy–Outcomes).

c) Not every heading may apply to your unit. If you have no information related to a given heading, please indicate that it is not applicable to you.

d) After answering all sub-items for a given criterion, please provide an assessment of your unit related to the criterion as a whole. In this assessment, describe how adequately your unit currently meets the criterion and any plans your unit has for the future regarding the criterion.

I Pedagogy

A. Interdisciplinary Pedagogy

1. **Current Initiatives:** Describe activities in your unit that support interdisciplinary pedagogy.

   Response:

2. **Outcomes:** Describe the outcomes of the initiatives and/or data that demonstrate the impact of these activities on student learning.

   Response:

3. **Improve Practice:** Provide documentation that the information in item 2 has been incorporated to improve practice.

   Response:

B. Interfacing Technology and Pedagogy

1. **Current Initiatives:** Describe activities in your unit that support the interfacing of pedagogy and technology.

   Response:

2. **Outcomes:** Describe the outcomes of the initiatives and/or data that demonstrate the impact of these activities on student learning.

   Response:

3. **Improve Practice:** Provide documentation that the information in item 2 has been incorporated to improve practice.

   Response:

C. Global Pedagogy

1. **Current Initiatives:** Describe activities in your unit that support global pedagogy.

   Response:

2. **Outcomes:** Describe the outcomes of the initiatives and/or data that demonstrate the impact of these activities on student learning.

   Response:

3. **Improve Practice:** Provide documentation that the information in item 2 has been incorporated to improve practice.

   Response:

D. Summary Analysis: In answering the following four questions, provide narratives that relate and tie together your discussions about interdisciplinary pedagogy, interfacing technology and pedagogy, and global pedagogy.

1. **Strengths:** Analyze the strengths of your unit regarding pedagogy.

   Response:

2. **Challenges:** Discuss the issues about pedagogy you see as challenging for your unit.

   Response:

3. **Emerging Issues:** Describe emerging issues related to pedagogy.

   Response:

4. **Planned Initiatives:** Include a brief description of any additional initiatives you plan to undertake.

   Response:

II Research/Scholarly Work/Creative Activity

A. Interdisciplinary Research/Scholarly Work/Creative Activity

1. **Current Initiatives:** Describe activities in your unit that support interdisciplinary research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response:

2. **Outcomes:** Describe the outcomes of the initiatives and/or data that demonstrate the impact of these activities on interdisciplinary research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response:

3. **Improve Practice:** Provide documentation that the information in item 2 has been incorporated to improve practice.

   Response:

B. Interfacing Technology and Research/Scholarly Work/Creative Activity

1. **Current Initiatives:** Describe activities in your unit that support the interfacing of technology and research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response:

2. **Outcomes:** Describe the outcomes of the initiatives and/or data that demonstrate the impact of these activities on technology and research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response.

3. **Improve Practice:** Provide documentation that the information in item 2 has been incorporated to improve practice.

   Response:

C. Global Research/Scholarly Work/Creative Activity

1. **Current Initiatives:** Describe activities in your unit that support global research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response:

2. **Outcomes:** Describe the outcomes of the initiatives and/or data that demonstrate the impact of these activities on global research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response:

3. **Improve Practice:** Provide documentation that the information in item 2 has been incorporated to improve practice.

   Response:

D. Summary Analysis: In answering the following four questions, provide narrative that relate and tie together your discussions about research/scholarly work/creative activity and interdisciplinarity, technology and globalization.

1. **Strengths:** Analyze the strengths of your unit regarding research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response:

2. **Challenges:** Discuss the issues about research/scholarly work/creative activity that you see as challenging for your unit.

   Response:

3. **Emerging Issues:** Describe emerging issues related to research/scholarly work/creative activity.

   Response:

4. **Planned Initiatives:** Include a brief description of any additional initiatives you plan to undertake.

   Response:

III Appendices

Attach any data or resource documents that support the narrative provided in items I and II.

In our session we will share the templates for the five criteria and discuss the twelve basic steps of our self-study. Copies of our Self-Study Report are available in the Annual Meeting Resource Room, and provide evidence of the effectiveness of our data gathering method.

Brenda LeMaster is Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio.

Lawrence Johnson is Dean of the College of Education at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio.

Chapter 16

New Designs in Higher Education

Self-Study and Evaluation: Special Challenges

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

NCA

**"Serving the Common Good:
New Designs in Higher Education"**

**Program of
The Higher Learning Commission**

106th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association

**March 31 – April 3, 2001
Hyatt Regency Chicago**

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Focusing on the Focused Visit: Strategies for Communication and Campus Involvement

Donald F. Larsson
Susan Coultrap-McQuin

Widespread campus involvement is a key factor for any successful self-study. It can sometimes be difficult to involve all the necessary campus constituencies even as part of the regular reaccreditation process. The need for campus involvement, though, can be even more acute when the self-study is being conducted for a focused visit, where the issues and stakes involved in the self-study and visit may be less apparent to the campus community. Effective communication can help ensure that the issues for the focused visit are being addressed and that both individual groups and the campus at large are involved in the self-study process.

Background to Our Focused Visit

In the spring of 1996, Minnesota State University, Mankato (then known as Mankato State University) was visited by an NCA Evaluation Team as part of its regular reaccreditation process. The team recommended continued accreditation for the university but also stipulated the need for a Focused Visit in spring 2000. The Evaluation Team highlighted three areas needing the attention of a Focused Visit: governance, evaluation and planning, and faculty/educational programs. Recognizing the importance of making progress in these areas, the administration and various faculty groups developed strategies for addressing the concerns. In the year preceding the scheduled Focused Visit, the senior vice president asked us (a dean and a faculty member with nearly two decades of experience on campus) to be co-chairs of the visit, including co-authoring the self-study and co-chairing an Advisory Committee with representatives from the faculty, support staff, students, and other key groups.

We approached writing the self-study like any research project that necessitated collecting relevant information, analyzing it, and then presenting it clearly to the readers. Not only did we plan to talk to a lot of people in order to collect information, but we also wanted to learn as much as we could by reading annual reports from various units, minutes of committees, and other documentation related to the focus areas. We understood our responsibilities to include extensive communication with groups across campus to make them aware of the visit and of the issues involved. We wanted to accurately represent campus views about our progress (or lack of it) and to set the stage for a successful visit, which was scheduled for February 2000.

Identifying Issues and Constituencies

One of our first tasks was to understand the issues that had been targeted for the Focused Visit by the NCA Evaluation Team. We carefully read the original team's full report in order to analyze their concerns in the three major areas and to be able to explain those concerns to others as the campus prepared for the visit. We found that each of the areas included several subareas of concern. The third focus area, faculty/educational programs, for example, was in fact quite wide-ranging, including concerns about general education, assessment of student outcomes, criteria for promotion and tenure, and faculty development. Equipped with our understanding of the concerns, we were ready to begin discussions with members of the campus about our progress.

Having identified the major issues and concerns to be addressed, we developed a list of individuals and groups on campus most centrally involved in work related to governance, evaluation and planning, and faculty/educational programs. While the focus areas were primarily related to academic and faculty issues, some (especially the focus on planning) also affected MSU students, student support services, fiscal affairs, and campus operations. Therefore, while most of those consulted were from the academic affairs side of campus, we were careful to encourage all groups across campus to participate in discussions and to be knowledgeable about the issues.

Among the principal people and groups we identified for extended consultation were:

- University president
- President's cabinet
- Senior vice president/vice president for academic affairs
- Academic Affairs Council (including college deans)
- Executive Committee of the campus faculty union
- Executive Committees of other bargaining units
- Department chairs and departments
- Student government leaders
- Student Affairs Council
- Planning Committee
- Budget Committee
- MSU Foundation
- Undergraduate Curriculum and Programs Committee
- General Education Subcommittee
- Program Review and Assessment Committee
- Graduate Committee
- Learning and Technology Roundtable
- Faculty Development Committee
- Faculty Development Coordinator
- NCA Focused Visit Advisory Committee

Gathering Information and Feedback

We collected information through discussions in various meetings and from responses in written formats. We envisioned a self-study that would be of use to the Focused Visit Team by (1) providing background information and explaining the institutional context for each of the three areas; (2) demonstrating progress (or explaining the lack of it) in each area; (3) reflecting as accurately as possible general campus views of the concerns; and (4) indicating campus intentions for continued progress after the visit. This vision gave us a working structure as we solicited information from campus constituencies who would help us to write the report.

Over the spring and summer of 1999, the focus areas were discussed in Academic Affairs Council, the chairpersons' workshop, Student Affairs Council, each college, various committees, our administration/faculty union council, and two open meetings. Some of these discussions took place without our direct presence, and we received reports of the groups' conclusions; however, individually or together, we also met with many of these groups. Some meetings were planned to solicit a maximum amount of commentary. For example, when meeting with department chairs and in an administration/faculty union retreat, we explained the Focused Visit, briefly outlined the issues, and then broke into small groups that returned comments, ideas, and questions on aspects of the Focused Visit. Other meetings were more wide-ranging. Our meeting with the Student Affairs Council, for example, solicited open-ended comments in the key areas, but the conversation also touched on related topics. Still other meetings were more narrowly focused. For instance, we asked the committees most directly related to a particular issue (such as the Planning Committee in relation to the second area of concern) to explain what work they had done in their area since the NCA visit, to provide any documentation they had, and to explain what work still needed to be done or what other areas needed to be addressed. We received suggestions and feedback from regular meetings with the Focused Visit Advisory Committee as well.

We also kept the larger campus community aware of our efforts. In April 1999 we sent a letter to all key groups and individuals and to the campus at large, informing them of the reason for the upcoming Focused Visit, giving examples of some of the information about progress on the focus issues that we had begun to receive from campus groups, and soliciting responses from any interested party. We provided regular updates about our plans, activities, and requests for information on the faculty/staff/student email announcements. We created a web site that explained the

Focused Visit, outlined the major issues, set out a timetable, and provided an email link for responses and suggestions (http://www.mnsu.edu/dept/ncafocus/ncahome.html).

While we did not receive a great deal of commentary through the email link or at the open meetings, the comments and feedback that we did get through all of the meetings were invaluable. They helped us understand the specific achievements of the campus, the obstacles that it had faced, and the campus opinion about those achievements. The information and comments we collected gave us a solid foundation with which to begin the first draft of the Self-Study Report.

Chronology for Focused Visit Preparations at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Fall 1999	Co-chairs appointed
Spring 1999	Focused Visit Advisory Committee begins to meet Fact-finding meetings, open discussions, written communications about Focused Visit issues
Summer 1999	Co-authors write complete draft of campus Self-Study Report
Fall 1999	Self-Study draft is circulated for discussion and comments Self-study draft is revised and submitted to NCA contact for comments and feedback
December 1999	Final Self-Study Report is submitted to NCA and Focused Visit team
January 2000	Final self-study is distributed on campus in preparation for visit by Focused Visit team
February 21–22, 2000	Focused Visit occurs
March 2000	Advisory Committee meets to assess the visit

Circulating Drafts of the Focused Visit Self-Study

We began writing the Self-Study Report by the middle of summer 1999. We knew that we could not afford to wait until the fall because we wanted to show a completed draft to our NCA contact by early November and to have had time for the campus to respond to at least one complete draft before that. We worked collaboratively, with each of us writing different sections of the report and the other reviewing, editing, and revising what the initial author had written. By the end of the summer, we had a complete draft ready to show to the campus.

During September and early October, we solicited commentary on the draft. We sent paper copies of the entire draft to each of the key individuals and groups we had identified and to each department and support office on campus. We also posted the complete draft on our web site, with links for email feedback. We again scheduled meetings with key individuals and committees and asked the deans, other administrators, and other leaders to discuss the draft with their units. We also sought to publicize widely these efforts to the campus and larger community. We held interviews with editors and reporters from campus publications and from the local city newspaper. In the meantime, the NCA Advisory Committee was also meeting to review and discuss the drafts. Thus, we continued to educate everyone on campus about the purpose of the Focused Visit and how the university was responding to the issues while preparing for the visit itself.

We used the new comments we were receiving as a basis for further revision of the Self-Study Report. Many groups had suggestions for clarifications and improvements, which we appreciated. We were sometimes disappointed by the comments that were the least critical. While it was heartening to be told that we had done a "great job," comments that targeted specific elements of the report for revision (or for praise!) were far more helpful to our rewriting efforts.

Preparing and Distributing the Final Version of the Self-Study

As we received comments on the draft, we continued to revise the report and to present our revisions to the Advisory Committee. By early November, we submitted a complete report to the president and senior vice president, who then sent it on to our NCA staff liaison. In December, we took the minor comments from the NCA staff and did our final revision and polishing of the report. Soon afterwards, the final version was submitted to NCA and the Focused Visit team in preparation for their February visit.

The final version of the report was also distributed in hard copy to all of the identified constituencies and posted on the university web site (http://www.mnsu.edu/dept/ncafocus/report.html) so the campus community would know how we had used their input and so that everyone could see the final document that was given to the Focused Visit Team. We encouraged the deans and other administrators to have a final discussion of the report with their units prior to the visit. We worked with the bargaining units and key campus committees to be sure that their members were well aware of visit details. Through email announcements and the web site we continued to update the campus on the preparations for the visit.

Preparing for the Focused Visit

Even as we were writing the final drafts of the Self-Study Report, we were also preparing for the actual visit by the Focused Visit team with the close participation of the president and senior vice president. The assistant vice president for undergraduate education and other members of the academic affairs staff gathered needed documentation, collated and assembled it in binders, and prepared a Resource Room where the campus community could examine the background documents and where the Focused Visit Team could meet and work. The president's office arranged for housing and set up the schedule for the visit itself.

Outcome and Conclusions

The actual Focused Visit went very smoothly. The report helped the team members understand the issues of concern and the ways in which the campus had identified and worked to deal with those issues. The campus was well-prepared for the visit, and key individuals and groups were ready to discuss the campus's achievements in specific and concrete ways. The open meetings with faculty and with other campus groups were well-attended. The evaluation team was able to report that Minnesota State University had met or was meeting the concerns for the Focused Visit and to recommend no further Focused Visits or other reports before the next full reaccreditation visit.

We were pleased that the visit had been so successful, and we were pleased at how actively the campus had participated in preparations for the self-study and visit. In a final, post-visit meeting of the Advisory Committee, the members commended the process and the opportunities for campus input and feedback. Though some committee members still wished that there had been even greater participation from those outside of academic affairs units, all agreed that the visit had been a success because of the widespread knowledge of the visit and the frequent communications. Of course, all of these efforts would have been for naught if the university had not made substantial progress in the Focused Visit areas!

Donald F. Larsson is Professor of English and Director of the Humanities Program at Minnesota State University in Mankato.

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Preparation for a Commission–Mandated Focused Visit

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Introduction

In 1998 an NCA Evaluation Team recommended that St. Louis Community College be granted continued accredited status with the next comprehensive evaluation in ten years, 2007–2008, and a focused visit scheduled for January 29–30, 2001. The focused visit was arranged for the purpose of reviewing three areas of concern: district governance and leadership, human resources, and assessment.

Between 1966 and the 1998 visit, the college had been visited by NCA four times. Since 1988 the college has been accredited as a single institution, not as individual campuses.

Background

St. Louis Community College is a public coeducational college supported by local taxes, state funds, and student fees. Created by area voters in 1962, the college offers freshman- and sophomore-level career, college transfer, developmental, and continuing education programs at its three campuses, four education centers, and numerous other locations throughout St. Louis City and County. More than 130,000 students enroll each year in credit and non-credit courses. The college also serves the business community with programs offering counseling, consulting, and training services.

Leadership Needed

In order to prepare for a successful focused visit, it is imperative to have strong leadership. In the case of SLCC, this began with Vice Chancellor for Education Patricia C. Donohue. Dr. Donohue, as the chief academic officer for the district, was named the focused visit coordinator. Throughout this time, she has worked in conjunction with John Cosgrove, who is the Director of Institutional Research and Planning. This office has provided the research for the Focused Visit Report.

Faculty members have been involved in leading the preparation for the visit as well. The faculty member who served as a campus NCA Coordinator and district Editor for the 1998 Self-Study Report transitioned to the position of Administrative Intern to the Vice Chancellor for Education. Forest Park Associate Professor of English Sally Souder provided continuity of leadership for NCA issues in this one-year released-time position for a faculty member who assists Dr. Donohue. Associate Professor of Speech and Theatre Donna Spaulding transitioned into this position for the remainder of the preparation for the visit. Their responsibilities included regular monitoring of progress, the writing and printing of the Report, organizing materials for the Resource Room, keeping the college community informed, and making preparations for the team's visit.

In the SLCC district, the Assessment Coordinator is a faculty member who has been released from regular faculty duties for a period of three years. As assessment was one of the areas cited for the focused visit, this person's leadership became very important. At the beginning of the three-year period, Dr. Richard Baker, Professor of History at the Meramec campus, held this position. Later, Dr. Larry McDoniel, Professor of English at Meramec, took over. The Assessment Coordinator leads the District Assessment Council, coordinates the campus assessment councils, and coordinates and facilitates the corps of assessment resource persons in departments across the district. Both Baker and McDoniel have played important roles in the preparation for the focused visit.

Beyond these leaders, the effort could not succeed without the support of the Board of Trustees and the College Leadership Team. The six-member Board of Trustees has been active in attending NCA conferences, offering advice, and meeting with the visiting team to demonstrate ongoing support. The Leadership Team includes the Chancellor of the college, Dr. Henry Shannon; Dr. Donohue; Vice Chancellor for Finance and Business Services Carla Chance; Florissant Valley President Gustavo Valadez Ortiz; Acting Forest Park President Ronald Smith; Meramec President E. Lynn Suydam; Director of Human Resources Ronald Nicoletti; and General Counsel Tina Odo. Members of this group have offered input to the report and have served as members of the Focused Visit Self-Study Steering Team.

Maintaining Momentum

Everyone reading this report knows the work involved to prepare for a comprehensive NCA visit. It is no small task. Many, if not most, members of the college community have been involved in one or more ways. Now imagine that the visit is over, and everyone wants to breathe a sigh of relief, but now you are told that a team will be back in three years to reexamine some specific issues.

If you can imagine this scenario, you have an idea of the reaction and feelings that must be overcome to prepare for the focused visit. There is no time to "let down" because the team will be here in a few short years, and there is much work to be done in the interim.

SLCC used several approaches to maintain the momentum toward the focused visit. One strategy was to immediately begin work in addressing the three issues. The NCA Coordinator for the 1998 self-study and key members of his team drafted a structure for addressing the three focus areas shortly after the preliminary review of the Team Report. This provided continuity and tapped the expertise of those most knowledgeable from the self-study process. This framework was used to immediately engage key staff with responsibilities for focus areas, who converted it to an action plan and schedule.

Since one of our issues was assessment, the Coordinator of Assessment had a key role in focusing college efforts to align with NCA concerns. Of the three issues, assessment was the one that affected absolutely everyone in the college. Because of the visibility of the coordinator and the building and execution of the Assessment Plan, everyone was constantly reminded that this work was ongoing.

Another approach was the execution of an extensive communications plan for the focused visit. We built a web page exclusively for the visit. It included the most up-to-date information available and included a direct link to the Administrative Intern, who was responsible for responding to any questions. It also included a direct link to the NCA home page for individuals who wanted to pursue information there. A document entitled "Progress Update" was created by the Administrative Intern as a summary of the action plan. The "Progress Update" was revised on a regular basis and distributed in a variety of ways. It was published at least once every semester in the site newsletters, included on the web page, and distributed freely at a variety of meetings.

The Administrative Intern was responsible for giving presentations and handing out copies of the "Progress Update" at meetings of the Board of Trustees, Leadership Team, Presidents' Cabinets, Vice Chancellor staff, Deans' Council, governance councils, student government associations, and many more.

An NCA Strategic Steering Committee was named to focus attention on and begin to plan for the next comprehensive visit in 2008. This committee is composed of representatives from administration, faculty, faculty union, governance councils, and strategic planning. The committee has created a planning document and serves as a think tank to assure we are addressing all important and necessary issues prior to the 2008 visit.

All these approaches came out of the office of the Vice Chancellor for Education. Dr. Patricia Donohue was the Focused Visit Coordinator and was the inspiration and driving force behind all these efforts. An amazing amount of work was accomplished during the three years from 1998 to 2001. We feel there has been no loss of momentum since the comprehensive visit.

Preparing the Document

Before writing the first draft, the Administrative Intern read many documents and met with various councils and administrative groups. She worked closely with the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor for Education in preparing the first draft of the chapter on governance. When the first draft was finished, the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor examined it, as did the Leadership Team, which includes the three campus presidents. After receiving their suggestions, she wrote a second draft.

That format held true for the chapters on human resources and assessment. The intern met with the Human Resources Director numerous times, as well as with the Assessment Coordinator and the Institutional Research and Planning Director. After she wrote a first draft, these officers examined it; the intern made corrections and then sent the chapters first to the Vice Chancellor for Education and then to the Leadership Team for review. The Deans' Council also examined and commented on the chapter drafts. Then the intern wrote a second draft, incorporating their suggestions.

SLCC submitted the second draft to SLCC's NCA staff liaison, who read it and made suggestions. The process continued in this way with new information being added and reviewed by SLCC officers and administrators. Members of the SLCC Board of Trustees also received copies of the second draft.

This process worked well for a focused visit self-study limited to three topics. It was quite a departure from the process that was used to write the comprehensive self-study for the visit in 1998, when many more members of the college community were actively involved in writing and critiquing the document.

Assessment as an Ongoing Issue

In preparing for and following the 1998 visit, administrative support for assessment was demonstrated by the appointment of the full-time Assessment Coordinator who reports directly to the Vice Chancellor for Education, by the hiring of an Assessment Associate, and by financial support for assessment. Faculty and staff support was demonstrated by participation in a variety of assessment activities, detailed below.

☐ Revision of the Assessment Plan

After the NCA visit in March 1998, the Summer (1998) Task Force on Assessment revised the 1996 assessment plan and created a five-year strategy for full implementation of assessment at St. Louis Community College. This plan was submitted to the college faculty and to the College Academic Council, and it was amended through joint work by this task force and NEA representatives.

Implemented in January 1999, the five-year strategy includes provisions for:

- Classroom assessment
- Course assessment
- Program assessment
- College services assessment
- Assessment of assessment
- Organization and supervision of assessment.

In each case, the proposed assessment involved students, faculty, staff, and administration in kinds and amounts of assessment rarely attempted before. The "culture of assessment" took a quantum leap.

☐ Assessment for NCA and Others

As SLCC approached its January 2001 focused visit, the existing assessment committees—a district-wide committee plus one at each of the three campuses—as well as the newly created assessment resource persons (ARPs) from each academic department in addition to the assessment liaisons to the various college services worked hard to implement the assessment procedures recently put into play. Because so many of our assessment policies and procedures were newly devised, considerable review and revision was necessary to refine what was being attempted. A new reporting mechanism called CARIS was commissioned and created. This intranet program allowed those involved in assessment to submit and track assessment reports immediately, thus eliminating the perpetual paper shuffle and its associated hazards.

Moreover, SLCC became even more attentive to assessment issues when presented with a state-wide mandate to describe and confirm students' competency in general education. Consequently, what was gained in meeting the demands of an NCA focused visit was soon paying dividends for those responding to the Missouri's general education project 2000-2001, for assessment is a significant issue in the general education "draft" to be posted on a state-wide web site by mid-May 2001.

Focused Visit Issues

☐ **District Governance and Leadership**

In order to write this portion of report, we had to begin with observation and reflection. Several of the issues the Visiting Team mentioned had to do with the specific personnel who were here in 1998. Since then, some of the administrators and Board of Trustees members have changed. These changes helped eliminate some of the issues that had been cited. Another team concern was the internal governance process. Again, changes were made and reported for the focused visit. An examination of the minutes of the council meetings provided evidence for the report.

☐ **Human Resources**

This part of the report was written in conjunction with HR personnel. Most of the team concerns in this area were specific and were best answered by members of the HR staff. We requested copies of new and updated documents, studies, and plans from their office. We conducted interviews with them and enlisted their aid in writing this section.

☐ **Assessment**

This portion of the report may have been the easiest to write because there was so much activity in the area of assessment. Virtually the entire college was involved in assessment activities in a very structured way. As mentioned earlier, the Assessment Coordinator led us through the steps of the assessment plan. The many activities, reports, council meetings, and newsletters provided the information for this part of the report. The college has truly developed a culture of assessment, and the report provides extensive evidence of this.

Conclusion

SLCC has worked hard to assure that we have a successful NCA focused visit in January 2001. We believe we have made substantial progress on each of the issues. It is difficult to give closure to this paper because we have not yet experienced the focused visit. When we give the presentation at the NCA Meeting, there will be new information to share with our audience.

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Why Are We Doing All This Work? The Real Benefits of Pursuing Regional Accreditation

Terry Allcorn
Ronald Oakes

When we entered into the accreditation process several years ago, we knew it was important to have regional accreditation to ease the transfer of credit to other regionally accredited institutions. While this is true, the accreditation process is a lot of work if we primarily sought accreditation to make it easier for our learners to leave. A few of us, though, had a difficult time articulating what regional accreditation implied for a college that was already accredited with a national accrediting association. By going through the self-study process and achieving candidacy status, we discovered some very real benefits to affiliation with The Higher Learning Commission that have an even more profound impact on our institution.

Background

Founded in 1956, Saint Louis Christian College is a private, church-related, nonprofit coeducational baccalaureate institution of higher education in the tradition of the Bible college movement. Since 1977, SLCC has been accredited with the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges (AABC), an association recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as the institutional accrediting agency on the national level for Bible colleges. Through the processes of revising our mission statement (1989–1993) and developing an objective-driven curriculum (1993–1996), we began to posture ourselves for the institutional challenges associated with the pursuit of regional accreditation.

The mission of Saint Louis Christian College is to provide Bible-centered higher education for men and women preparing for Christian service. As a small institution with 200 learners enrolled in four degree programs (BA, BS, AA, AAS), including a nontraditional adult degree-completion program, we had been reaffirmed and granted another ten-year accreditation status with AABC in 1998. There were a number of employees who questioned the wisdom of pursuing regional accreditation.

As a result, several barriers were raised in the form of questions that demanded an institutional response: Why is regional accreditation necessary? How will we be able to develop campus-wide ownership of this process? How can we overcome the perception that association with NCA would somehow diminish our commitment to Christian higher education? How would NCA evaluate our Bible-based curriculum? Will NCA's emphasis on assessment of student learning force us to violate our own mission and core values?

Concurrent with the AABC self-study, the Trustees in November 1997 approved seeking affiliation with NCA. The Preliminary Information Form was sent to NCA three months after being reaffirmed with AABC. Later in 1998, the NCA staff analysis of our PIF approved nineteen of the twenty-four GIRs, which represent the entry-level threshold for association with the Commission. Not only did we have to respond to the questions, but now we had to develop an action plan to address the five remaining GIRs.

In an effort to address those concerns and to keep moving forward in the pursuit of candidacy status, we developed some strategies that will assist you in the process as well.

Strategies That Benefited Us

☐ We Sought Extensive External Counsel and Advice

Off campus: We investigated what others were doing in key areas of institutional effectiveness.

1. We sent representatives to an assessment conference at Alverno College to learn from their expertise.
2. We sent six representatives to last year's NCA Annual Meeting.
3. We sent a representative to speak with a college that was denied candidacy status. They were kind enough to allow us to view their materials and to give us some insights into our own situation.
4. Every time we send someone to a conference, he or she brings back important information to us. We are a better college because of it.

On campus: We brought in people who could provide experienced counsel.

1. A consultant-evaluator who serves as an administrator from a college with a similar mission statement and purpose addressed the entire college community. He explained the benefits of regional accreditation and helped alleviate some concerns that had been expressed. We purposefully targeted everyone, not just the faculty and not just those directly involved in the process.
2. Another administrator helped us address one of our areas of concern: that of assessment.
3. We invited our NCA staff liaison to visit our campus and to provide additional constructive suggestions.

☐ We Developed Strategic Response Plans to Address Institutional Weaknesses

1. For example, we targeted specific curriculum issues that the process had brought to light. We were particularly concerned about our general education curriculum. Much of what we do is fairly specialized in the other two divisions, Biblical and professional. We knew that the one thing we would have in common with every evaluator was general education.
2. We completed a comparative program and curriculum analysis of both NCA-affiliated institutions and our sister Bible colleges that were regionally accredited. We evaluated total required hours in the general and professional divisions as well as the Biblical division. We identified specific courses required in those institutions. All of this was to determine common practice in institutions of higher education.
3. As a result, we adjusted our general education curriculum and added a full-time English professor.
4. The faculty made a decision not to reduce our Bible requirements below 39 hours for the four-year degree programs. We felt this was in line with our mission and purpose. We have also recently begun considering an adjustment to our curriculum to meet the new Missouri guidelines. This close scrutiny of our curriculum is a result of our association with the NCA.
5. Every one of these actions improved our institution and the education we offer to our learners. During this period, our institution made the key transition from making adjustments to receive accreditation to making adjustments to improve the quality of our institution. This was more than a change in semantics; it was a change of motivation. Our strong belief is that without this transition, while we might have received candidacy status, we would have not understood the real fruits of all our labors.

☐ We Sought Internal Counsel and Advice

1. We surveyed our learners to get an accurate view of their perceptions of our program and their general level of satisfaction.
2. We held meetings where all campus personnel were able to contribute their ideas and opinions concerning where our priorities should be.
3. We used interviews and questionnaires to reach learners, faculty, staff, administration, trustees, and alumni.
4. All of this gave us a fuller understanding of both how we perceived ourselves and where we should concentrate our efforts to improve our programs.

☐ **We Gave Extensive Communication to the College Community**

1. The President's office sent internal newsletters to the campus community. The Self-Study Committee also circulated information.
2. Our constituency was kept informed by the college newsletter. The learners were kept informed through a newsletter published by Student Services.
3. When our self-study was completed, we created an executive summary to provide to the campus community and constituents. This summary has been very well received. It allowed us to briefly show the results of our self-study without the huge amount of information in the principal documents.

☐ **We Conducted a Mock Evaluation Team Site Visit**

1. We scheduled a mock team visit about one month prior to the actual site visit. The team was made up of in-state consultant-evaluators with site visit team experience. This recommendation by NCA was one of our best strategies. We were able to allow the campus community to experience what a real visit might be like and benefited from the counsel of experienced consultants.
2. The consultants helped us identify weaknesses in areas such as strategic planning, identifying the process to respond to perceived institutional challenges, and the compilation of documentation for our Resource Room. The consultants looked at our preparation for the actual site visit to help us put the finishing touches on our presentation to the actual site consultants.

We would like to be able to say that we would have done all of the above whether we would were applying for NCA affiliation or not. As an institution, we are concerned about offering a high-quality education to our learners. However, our association with NCA has provided us with the resources to offer a program of higher quality than we could have done on our own.

The Strategies Produced Results That Benefited Us

Our candidacy status with NCA provides us with the credentials to give both our constituents and those not associated with the college confidence that we are a reputable institution of higher learning. However, affiliation with the Commission has had a profound impact on our institution in more substantial manners:

1. **Helped to strengthen our self-identity.** It helped us identify and solidify who we are. We were asked to identify our role in higher education, identify our core values, and determine how we can better fulfill our mission.
2. **Increased the quality of our curriculum.** It raised the quality of our curriculum, specifically our general education curriculum, to new levels of excellence and made it compatible with what most see today as a well-balanced program.
3. **Focused our attention on student learning and assessment.** It has raised our awareness of the need to assess all that we do as an institution and to compare that assessment to national norms and trends.
4. **Increased institutional ownership.** It raised the level of cooperation and community of all parties involved in the life of the institution. It has brought a new level of energy to the campus. We chose to use our size to our advantage. Almost everyone on campus played some role in preparing for our affiliation with the Commission and shares in the satisfaction of having done so.
5. **Revitalized our trustees and alumni.** They saw something happening on campus to be excited about. They are beginning to catch a glimpse of what the institution can be and are taking more ownership in the life of the college.
6. **Heightened our concern to provide a fully credentialed faculty.** We now do a better job completing the professional portfolios of our full-time and part-time instructors. We also take a more critical look at our adjunct hiring practices.
7. **Clarified institutional principles, policies, and procedures.** We are more organized. We developed manuals for every area of the institution. The faculty had benefited from a manual for some time. However, it needed to be revised and updated. The administration, staff, adjunct faculty, and trustees had functioned

for more than 40 years without a manual. Lines of authority and procedures are now clearly spelled out. We are more structured. We now document the process as well as the decision. It raised our awareness of the fact that the process by which we make a decision is just as important as the decision itself.

8. **Demonstrated the determination of the institution.** It showed us just how far we could push ourselves. Our aspiration to favorably compare ourselves with the best institutions of higher education took our best efforts, both individually and corporately.

Conclusion

Our contact with The Higher Learning Commission has always been cordial and collegial. It soon became apparent to us that, while the Commission expected the highest quality in our programs, their evaluations were intended to help us improve the quality of our educational programs and not to criticize them. The Higher Learning Commission never asked us to make any adjustments to our institution that went against our mission statement. In fact, they would have counseled us against contradicting our mission statement or our institutional core values.

We benefited from both the strategies to address the problems (the process) and the actual results of the strategies (institutional improvements). We are a much better college because we decided to affiliate with the NCA. While we would have been greatly disappointed if we had not gained candidacy status, it would not have removed all of the progress our institution made as we went through the process.

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Bridging the Gap to Accreditation and Beyond: A Case Study of How the Self-Study Process Shaped an Institution Moving from No Affiliation to Initial Accreditation

Myleea Hill
Christy Huddleston

Background

Regional accreditation was part of the original vision of Crowley's Ridge College when it was founded in 1964. While various obstacles and unforeseen challenges caused an extended delay, CRC never lost sight of its goal. A 1992 federal ruling putting CRC students' eligibility for federal financial assistance in jeopardy provided the impetus for CRC to begin the process of seeking accreditation with the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools in earnest. CRC received candidacy status in 1996 and continued candidacy in 1998. Granted initial accreditation in August 2000, Crowley's Ridge College is an example of the impact the self-study and accreditation process can have in shaping an institution. In just over five years, CRC bridged the gap from non-affiliation to initial accreditation.

The NCA staff response to the CRC Preliminary Information Form in 1994 laid out a road map for needed improvements in the college's educational programs and operating structure. Since submitting the PIF, CRC has undergone a steep learning curve to meet General Institutional Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation. Benchmarking and increased understanding of "common practices" in higher education precipitated organizational and cultural changes as the private two-year college made the journey to accreditation. Information gleaned during NCA Annual Meetings prepared the college to meet challenges and recognize opportunities during the mid-1990s. The lessons learned from the self-study process have been beneficial as the college builds on accreditation and prepares to focus on success rather than survival.

"BASSic" Building Blocks

CRC's experience provides a case study of the opportunities and obstacles facing institutions in the self-study process. It also demonstrates how the road to accreditation shapes an institution and leads to significant and systemic organizational changes in budgeting, assessment, shared governance, and strategic planning. These four key issues served as signposts as CRC traveled the road from non-affiliation to an accredited institution. An acrostic of BASS was used to emphasize to the college community necessary modifications. The progress in budgeting, assessment, strategic planning, and shared-governance initiatives cut to the heart of how CRC operates and makes decisions.

- **B = Budgeting.** The 1994 PIF and 1995 Evaluation Team both commented on the highly centralized budgeting processes. During the 1998 team visit, the process was improving but not fully functioning. By the 2000 visit, the self-study found and Evaluation Team confirmed a budgeting process that was linked to shared-governance and strategic planning, with budgeting managers exercising control over their divisions.

  Strategic planning, shared-governance procedures, and board directives have an impact on the way the college derives and spends money. Through budgetary processes established during the extended self-study process, the college improved its ability to project income and track expenses. Budgets are established through strategic planning, which sets priorities necessary to reach agreed-upon goals. Line-item monthly budget reports notify department budget managers of available funds. The collaborative process has resulted in a decentralized system in which budget managers have both more responsibility and the authority to make fiscal decisions in keeping with established priorities.

  As an institution of higher learning, CRC places emphasis on support of instruction. The restructuring of budget processes placed priority on assuring that necessary learning equipment be made available. The budgetary cycle allows for "phases" in which urgent–particularly academic–items may be purchased at the beginning of the fiscal year. Approval of requested non-essential items may be contingent on available funds and the college's overall financial condition based on mid-year checkpoints. The system has allowed the college to balance a "no-deficit spending" directive by the board with the need to maintain proper learning support.

- **A = Assessment.** Formal assessment of academic achievement has led to significant and substantial improvements in CRC's academic program. Such changes include the establishment of a developmental program, restructuring courses, and outlining measurable goals. The use of assessment has led to documentation of student learning as well as recommendations for providing programs in support of the college's open admissions policy. With oversight by faculty and support from the administration and board, the assessment program has been a key tool in quality improvements to educational programs. One of the most important utilizations of assessment data is through strategic planning in establishing budgetary and funding priorities for instructional materials and professional development for instructors.

  Where in the past CRC relied on informal and anecdotal evidence, formal assessment methods now document educational outcomes and point to areas of improvement. An unanticipated but welcome result of formalized assessment has been its effect on campus morale and the college's overall image. Alumni reports and proficiency tests demonstrated that CRC students scored in a comparable range with regional and national students. These findings energized the campus community as it began not to look just for ways to prove that the college offered a quality education but to improve the quality of education that is being provided.

- **S = Shared governance.** Arguably, the single biggest contributor to progress at CRC in recent years has been shared governance because of the positive effect it has had on communication and information flow between and among students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the board of trustees. Through shared governance, the college has moved from a centralized bottle neck to an increasingly empowered organization with personnel having the authority to make decisions and implement policies to improve the operation of the college. Shared governance has boosted morale and enabled employees to feel a sense of ownership in the college.

  Shared governance has functioned both through administratively appointed committees and an autonomous faculty senate. Where appointed committees include a cross-section of students, faculty, administration, and staff members to accomplish designated agenda items, the faculty senate incorporates full-time and part-time faculty members (excluding administrators) and distributes minutes directly to the board of trustees and other campus constituencies. Established in 1995, the faculty senate has a tradition of discussing issues impacting the campus learning environment. The board has credited faculty senate minutes with providing vital information as it made policy necessary to accomplish CRC's mission.

  Appointed shared-governance committees have also been effective in maximizing the varied experiences and expertise of CRC employees. The collaboration of shared governance enhanced morale, as "we" worked together to solve problems rather than talking about something "they" should do. However, shared governance may have fallen prey to the "too much of a good thing" syndrome. Over the course of five years, the shared governance system ballooned to up to 16 committees, which proved to be overly cumbersome for a college of less than 10 full-time faculty members. Through the 2000 self-study cycle, CRC recognized the need to restructure and has since consolidated committees. Shared governance continues to be a powerful force on campus as administrators, faculty, and staff work side by side and employees provide leadership to teams across organizational chart lines.

◇ **S = Strategic Planning.** Making and implementing long-range plans has been perhaps the biggest challenge in an institution that has traditionally focused more on survival than planning for the future. Through an increasingly comprehensive five-year strategic plan, the college developed plans and methodologies for implementation. Initiated in 1995, a single planning team with representation from the community, board, administration, alumni, faculty, and staff laid the groundwork for strategic planning at CRC. In 1997, a board resolution shifted the strategic planning process to a participative, mission-driven process including short- and long-term plans of up to five years. The college mission and goals were integrated with specific planning goals to ensure that planning included a student focus. A scenario planning model helped foresee possible conditions, but was viewed by the Evaluation Team as lacking in specificity. In 1999, strategic planning was further revised to broaden campus participation and allow for comprehensive inputs and specific targets in enrollment and fundraising. Appointing planning teams and plan managers effectively empowered employees to take steps and make improvements in their area and also increased a culture of accountability. By involving a variety of stakeholders in planning, CRC has taken advantage of the insights of personnel who are responsible for executing plans. Because budgeting is coordinated through strategic planning, it remains a vital and evolving process for the college. Many of the self-study recommendations and responses to the visiting team concerns are channeled through strategic planning teams, so it continues to play an integral role in the progress of the college.

While the methods mentioned above undeniably provided the structure CRC needed to meet NCA criteria, it is also true that the processes are hollow without people to make them work. The personnel at CRC evolved both in number and outlook as long-time and new employees rose to the challenge and overcame obstacles. Ultimately, the newly instituted systems combined with a dedicated workforce to reach a "point of no return" in progress toward accreditation. As the systems became more and more ingrained into the college culture, personnel became more confident in their abilities to make and implement decisions. A common phrase used to explain both setbacks and successes has been "communication." As the saying goes, "Talk is cheap, but communication is priceless." Once personnel reached a point of realizing that structures were in place, ideas turned into action and action turned into results.

Step by Step

CRC ran into its share of roadblocks as it pursued accreditation, but typically even setbacks led to improvements. Having begun addressing items from the PIF submitted in 1994, the college took a much anticipated first step in 1996 when it received candidacy status. In 1998, CRC decided that it could benefit from being evaluated next to the higher standards of initial accreditation even though it could remain in candidacy two more years. When a visiting team listed 17 concerns in recommending continued candidacy, the college viewed it as a wake-up call.

Renewed efforts, along with encouragement from the 1998 team that CRC had "made steady progress," brought the college community to the 1999–2000 self-study cycle. While conducting three self-studies in five years was challenging, it also helped the college measure its progress and recognize accomplishments in organization and education. At the kick-off meeting for the 1999–2000 self-study hosted by the faculty senate, the Self-Study Coordinator encouraged employees and board members to "build our case" for accreditation. Looking back on five years, documented progress was evident not just in the processes noted above but also in facts and figures such as enrollment and fundraising. Once completed, the 2000 Self-Study Report was distributed to the college community with the admonition to "believe we belong." The saying was largely based on assessment data that showed the success of CRC graduates in comparison to students across the state and nation. Finally, posters, memos, and public announcements encouraged students, employees, alumni, and the community to "tell our story" to the Evaluation Team. Team members complimented the show of community support and especially the attendance at an open student meeting. (Forty-four out of 153 students attended.) While the connection between processes and people may not seem obvious, at CRC they worked together to build an atmosphere in which people truly believe their input makes a difference.

Onward and Upward

CRC is understandably pleased with the progress noted in the self-study and verified by the visiting team, but the desire is for accreditation not to be an end in itself, but rather a springboard to a brighter future. The Self-Study Report, visiting team report, and institutional response outline focus items, concerns, and recommendations. Obstacles, opportunities, and challenges have developed as CRC makes the transition from the intensity of the self-study to trying to institute sustained improvements. In the months following obtaining accreditation, plans have met with both setbacks and successes. While some factors–such as the resignation of the chief fundraising officer, the retirement of the director of research and planning, and the announced retirement of the president–were unanticipated, a more formalized structure could have helped maintain momentum.

The NCA *Handbook of Accreditation* explains the importance of establishing methods for addressing the findings of the self-study. "As part of the formal self-study process the Steering Committee or some other new or existing group needs to be charged by the Executive Officer, after the Evaluation Team leaves, to track the recommendations the self-study produced; the recommendations need to be assigned formally to those individuals and groups in the institution whose job it is to deal with the areas concerned." (NCA *Handbook of Accreditation*, Second Edition, p. 77). In previous self-study cycles, the steering committee remained intact because a new Self-Study Report was due to be produced in two years. After receiving initial accreditation in 2000 and the subsequent turnover in personnel, the steering committee did not continue this role. A Self-Study Coordinator's compilation was distributed to faculty members and planning teams. Although items are being addressed, it has become apparent that a transition team could have been advantageous in building on momentum from the self-study process. So, while there is much to be learned from the case study of CRC's accomplishments, other institutions are also invited to improve on CRC's methods by formally assigning a group to track recommendations.

Summary

Many systemic organizational changes in budgeting, assessment, shared governance, and strategic planning developed as CRC bridged the gap to accreditation. The accreditation journey didn't end with the self-study, the Evaluation Team, or even the Review Committee. CRC has learned that once an institution crosses the bridge to accreditation there are new roads to travel. Just like getting to accreditation, having–and following–a road map is a good idea.

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